

**MACRO AND MICROCONTEXTUAL TABOO WORDS
IN IRANIAN PRE AND POST REVOLUTION MOVIES**

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ABSTRACT

Taboo words are the inseparable parts of language. It has been proved that this phenomenon exists in all languages including Farsi. Taboo words change over time. Some words, which were considered once taboo in the past, do not carry any “tabooness” at present. Hence, in an attempt to investigate the changes of taboo words/expressions in Farsi language, a research was conducted. This study compares the taboo words used by characters in movies. These characters portray lower class and middle class members of Iranian society. Two Iranian movies produced before and after the revolution (1979) in Iran are chosen to conduct this study. The data source of the taboo words come from “Qeisar” and “The Separation”. To answer the research questions and analyze the data, Hongxu and Guisen’s (1990) framework for taboo words is used. According to this classification, the researcher first categorizes the used taboo words/expressions into seven (7) tabooed subjects. The study also investigates the factors which have influenced the formation of those taboo words among lower class and middle class members of Iranian society including macrocontextual (societal) factors and microcontextual (situational) factors. This study shows how the concept of tabooness and the factors that led to taboo formation have changed over time.

ABSTRAK

Perkataan pantang adalah bahagian yang tidak dapat dipisahkan daripada bahasa. Ia telah dibuktikan bahawa fenomena ini wujud dalam semua bahasa termasuk Farsi. Perkataan pantang berubah mengikut masa. Beberapa perkataan, yang dianggap pantang sekali pada masa lalu, tidak membawa apa-apa “kepantasan” pada masa kini. Oleh itu, dalam usaha untuk menyiasat perubahan kata-kata pantang bahasa dan ungkapan dalam bahasa Farsi, satu kajian telah dijalankan. Kajian ini membandingkan perkataan pantang digunakan oleh watak-watak dalam filem-filem. Watak-watak ini menggambarkan kelas bawahan dan anggota kelas pertengahan masyarakat Iran. Dua filem Iran dihasilkan sebelum dan selepas revolusi (1979) di Iran dipilih untuk menjalankan kajian ini. Sumber data kata-kata pantang adalah dari “Qeisar” and “The Separation.” Untuk menjawab soalan-soalan kajian dan menganalisa maklumat, penyelidik menggunakan rangka kerja Hongxu and Guisen’s (1990) untuk kata-kata pantang yang digunakan. Berdasarkan klasifikasi mereka, penyelidik mula mengkategorikan kata-kata pantang dan ungkapan pantang ke dalam tujuh subjek pantang larang. Kajian ini juga menyiasat factor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pembentukan kata-kata pantang itu dikalangan kelas bawahan dan anggota kelas pertengahan masyarakat Iran termasuklah factor macrocontextual (masyarakat) dan factor-faktor microcontextual (keadaan). Kajian ini menunjukkan bagaimana konsep kepantasan dan factor-faktor yang berkesan dalam pembentukan kata-kata pantang berubah sejak tempoh masa ini.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every individual is different because each of us comes from a different background and as such we also carry a different mindset towards things that happen around us. We each have different values, religious beliefs, education, experience, exposure to life and so there is no one right way for us to speak or convey meanings when interacting with others. Likewise, language as a tool of communication is only an instrument which human beings use to convey their message systematically as the rules of the language require. Each speaker will bring upon him/herself different aspects of his/her life to articulate the very same meanings using language. Thus, the way each speaker conveys his/her words and messages will not be exactly alike.

As a branch of linguistics, sociolinguistics is the study of language and its use in society. In general, sociolinguists study how members of a society use the language among themselves. Trudgill (1974) mentions that sociolinguistics is a part of linguistics that is concerned with language and cultural phenomena. Holmes (1992) notes that the way a person talks can be taken as a good indicator of his/her social background. It has been perceived that the better educated may have more refined vocabulary to exploit while the less educated may have to rely on coarse terms while indulging in verbal interactions (Holmes, 1992). Similarly, a professional person has the liberty to use technical jargon because of his/her professional standing whereas a layperson would be lost when these words are used.

Society is made up of various classes and types of people and this very same people are from diverse backgrounds comprising various cultures, values, experiences, and so on.

Depending on the different background, 'culture' can evoke different senses of meanings for different people depending on whether one is a linguist, sociologist, anthropologist or psychologist.

As a result, when language is articulated, the words used, the way it is said and how it is said provides a window for others to evaluate a speaker's background i.e. his/her culture, customs, beliefs, attitudes, education and social background. In brief, a speaker's words reflect the society in which he/she has grown up and lived in.

A society also has norms when it comes to using 'taboo' words. For a layperson a taboo word is simply a word that creates negative feelings when used. Trudgill (1974) says that taboo words may not be acceptable in some cases, because they sound crude or because they harbor negative connotations. Nonetheless, taboo words and the usage of taboo words are still fairly prevalent in some communities and within particular circles. For example, young people use certain words which are considered taboo by adults and among men, there are certain words which are taboo to women.

"Taboo, in relation to language, is associated with things which are forbidden because they are not suitable based on certain religion or custom in a society and it also provokes violent reactions of apparently very real shock and disgust" says Liedlich (1973, p.107). A taboo word can be a socially prohibited word or it refers to a word that has been banned as a reference to certain objects, actions, discussions or people. Taboo words are therefore considered as derogatory and insensitive because they are considered as undesirable or offensive by a particular group, culture or society (Khan & Parvaiz 2010:24). Taboo words, in some cases, may also be disallowed by law, religion and culture. For instance, anyone boarding a plane in today's context is not allowed to use the word 'bomb' even as a joke. This is because the word itself is associated with

‘terrorism’ since the 9-11 event in 2002. Sometimes, a word is considered taboo because it is associated with a lack of decency and sometimes, a word is not used by the average member of society because it does not seem polite therefore in the long run, that word becomes a taboo word. In the Malaysian context, for example, Malay speakers will never say that they are going to the toilet to clear their bowels directly. The Malay language itself contains some phrases which Malay speakers can use to indicate the same action. These phrases, when used, come across as polite. For instance, if a Malay speaker needs to go to the toilet to urinate, he/she says in Malay ‘buang air’ (throw water) which means to urinate instead of the word, ‘kencing’. Iranians, for instance, do not use the word ‘toilet’ when they want to talk about it. Instead, they use the word ‘dast shooie’ which means a place to wash hands. In contrast, among the Chinese there is no such phrase or any polite substitute. Over the years, the Chinese have become more practical than their fore fathers so even if there were such polite terms in the past, these terms would have been discarded (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).

Taboo words do not occur naturally. It is the work of human beings, who in wanting to preserve their community in a certain way, make such impositions and so when it becomes a norm, the usage of such words is thus perceived as ‘taboo’. The English word ‘gay’, for instance, was a normal word in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s but after a few decades, the word ‘gay’ is used differently. Today, one has to be very careful when one uses the word ‘gay’. Likewise, because of the pressure of human rights, people do have to be careful with normal terms such as ‘fat’, ‘ugly’ and ‘short’ because used without thinking; they become offensive to certain people. Thus, even though these words are not taboo in general, they can cause offense.

How does a word become taboo? No one knows for sure but very often it is the convention or the norm of society that creates the need to turn a word into a taboo word. This often occurs due to particular social values and beliefs (Trudgill 1986: 29). For instance, when a society becomes extremely religious, it may impose so much strong values so that some normal words turn into taboo words. In the Asian context, for instance, any word related to 'sex' is taboo.

The influence of technology, mass media, Internet, and other inventions can also have an impact on the process of making or removing words taboo. The 9-11, 2002 event resulted in the words 'bomb' and 'terrorist' becoming taboo words when used in airports or on airplanes. Today's world which focuses on physical outlook has generated taboo words such as 'fat', 'short', 'poor' or 'retarded'. In a way, making words taboo can make people realize that the feelings of other individuals need to be considered when they speak. On the other hand, it can also curtail naturalness because people may become false when they consistently have to watch the words they use. Similarly, in Iranian society, many taboo words exist due to Iranian culture, religion, social and political status and other factors.

1.1 Language and Taboo Words in Iran

Farsi is the official language in Iran. This language has also gone through a series of evolution particularly after the revolution occurred in 1979. The revolution had transformed the country from a monarchy system to a republic. Since the revolution, the impact of new ideologies, political issues and social norms and attitudes on Farsi language is noticeable. Keshavarz (1988) conducted a research on the forms of address used in post revolutionary Iran and he suggests that the revolution in Iran had resulted in a change of address terms. He adds that there are now more solidarity terms being used

and they include address terms such as “brother” and “sister” instead of “ladies’ and “gentlemen”. Keshavarz (1988) agrees with Hudson’s (1980) theory which says that social factors including social structure and norms, cultural pattern, socio-economic, political and religious status, age and sex affects the language a community use. In the case of Iran, the revolution had brought about such changes.

It must be considered that the nature of taboo in Iranian culture is something other than moral and religious prohibitions. They believe if they break a taboo either in action or in speech, there is an extraordinary and mysterious power existing in taboo that will punish them (Salehi, 2002). As a result, Iranians avoid using taboos, in particular in their daily conversation to protect themselves from the curse and the punishment of that mysterious power. Considering Iran as a closed society (Popper, 1985), moral prohibitions, religion and social lawfulness plus the political restrictions has always led to the formation of taboo words. However, the tabooeness of these words may have strengthen or weaken through time in Iran particularly before and after the revolution (Bakhtiar, 2011).

Iranian taboo words are mostly gendered taboos (Teymori, 2012). This means, the gender of the speaker can determine the tabooeness of a word regardless of how intense that taboo words could be.

A brief look at the language people had used before and after the revolution is one way of distinguishing the difference. As language evolves through time, the change affecting society can also affect the way people use language. For instance, the revolution could have affected people’s attitudes and so language use could have made some adjustments to social norms, the political systems, the religious beliefs, and the cultural issues contained within the society (Azqandi, 2000). In this regard, it appears that the concept

of tabooeness arising in the Iranian society would also vary as a result of the revolution. It is hypothesized that the Iranian society may have experienced change in language, particularly in the concept of verbal tabooeness.

The following section will provide some background to the social structure of Iran.

1.2 Social Structure in Iran before the Revolution

Prior to the revolution of 1979 in Iran, education was a source or the essential key for the non-elites of all classes to improve their social status (Azqandi, 2000).

Although educational opportunities were opened up, the elites still had more opportunities compared to the non-elite groups. This is because the former had the wealth which the latter was deprived off. Ultimately, this disparity became a source of resentment for the non-elites, especially among the middle class who felt oppressed by the political powers.

In the past the social structure of Iran, before the revolution, was divided into four major categories: 1.The Upper Class, 2.The Middle Class, 3.The Working Class and 4.The Lower Class (Keddie, 1971). The definitions of these social classes are as follow:

Upper Class:

The upper class consisted of the elites, such as land owners, industrial and commercial founders, and merchants who were connected to the Iranian political powers. They were also mostly educated, and wealth was the most important criteria for this group of people (Satrapi, 2003).

Middle Class:

The middle class people before the revolution were divided between those who had a Western education and possessed a secular outlook and those who valued religion in both their public and private life. The latter tended to view the former with suspicion and were often suspicious of Western education. In general, the professionals, university lecturers, and those employed in the bureaucracy tended to be more secular while the bazaar merchants and the clergies tended to be more religious- oriented. School teachers had almost the same share of secular and religious point of view (Metz, 1987).

Working Class:

The industrialization programs of the Pahlavi regime officially established a distinct working-class (kaargar) by the 1970s. The working class itself had two sub-categories: those who worked in oil industries, manufacturing, construction and transportation and those who were mechanics and artisans in bazaar workshops. Interestingly, factory workers doubled in number in 1965 and they accounted for 25 percent of Iran's total labor force then. The workers were divided according to their perceived skills. For instance, electricians, plumbers and those in textile manufacturing and metal goods production earned significantly higher wages than unskilled workers. The skilled workers also tended to look down upon the unskilled workers who had no job security compared to the skilled ones (Saber, 1990).

Lower Class:

This group is demarcated by the high rate of illiteracy and their performance of manual labor. They comprised those who were described as urban lower class. The lower class was also divided into two groups: those with regular employment and those without. Those with regular employment included domestic servants, bath attendants, porters,

street cleaners, peddlers, street vendors, gardeners, office cleaners, laundry workers and bakery workers (Metz, 1987). Many of these jobs were performed seasonally or occasionally. Before the revolution, many members of this group also resorted to prostitution, gambling, smuggling and drug selling. At the time of the revolution, one-third of the population of Tehran, the capital city of Iran, comprised one-quarter of the population of the other large cities who were mainly the lower class members (Azqandi, 2000).

1.3 Social Structure in Iran after the Revolution

Metz (1987) and Keddie (1971) mention that after the revolution in the late 1980s, it was difficult to do field research to determine whether the traditional bases for ascribing social class status had changed. However, it seems that access to political power continued to be an important feature for those ascribing for social status even though the composition of the political elites had changed. It also appears that at the same time, education has not lost its charm as it was still an important basis to determine the social status of the non-elites. In the post-revolutionary context, one can observe that the four social classes in Iranian society continue to exist but this time a new political elite had also emerged. This political elite consists of the senior clergymen, religious experts and those who were perceived to be pious individuals. This group held their positions as key government administrators because of their perceived commitment to Islam religion. They became a part of the new political elites but they were not considered as members of the old social elites. In contrast, the old social elites who were landowners and large-scale merchants continued to remain as the part of the upper class living in Iran, having retained a considerable part of their wealth through the past. However, for the most part, such persons no longer had political influences and this was good because it stopped them from acquiring more or new wealth (Saber, 2012).

After the revolution, the composition of the middle class was not different from what it had been under the monarchy. There were professionals, medium-scale landowners, military officers and the junior ranks of the clergy. Unlike the middle-class which existed before the revolution, some middle-class groups now had more access to political powers than others. This is because the new political elite was primarily recruited from the middle class (Azqandi, 2000). In comparison to the past, the new political elites now regarded those with foreign education with suspicion. Many members of the middle class who were educated abroad were now required to undergo special Islamic indoctrination courses if they wanted to retain their jobs.

After the revolution, it appears that the working class group also experienced the same situation as before the revolution. Their work unions were not strong and they played only a passive role. In any event, it also appears that unions were being strictly controlled by the government. Strikes, if they occur, were considered as unpatriotic and so the government endeavored to suppress both workers' strikes and other independent efforts which were organized to help the workers. Observation of the Iranian social structure at this time indicates that the workers played an important role in undermining the monarchy during its final months. When the new government took over from the monarchy, it embraced the view of its royalist predecessor which regarded independent labor activities and strikes to be un-Islamic (Saber, 2012).

After the revolution, there was much reliance on begging in the streets as jobs and other employment continue to follow the same pattern as in the past. As the working class could not make enough money to sustain their livelihood, they tried other means such as prostitution, gambling and drug selling. However, those who were found guilty of these activities were severely punished by the government. The newspapers and official

sources however, were not able to determine the real statistics of such committed crime. After the new government took over in 1979, the life conditions of this social class could not be detected because there was no evidence of measures announced by the new government (Satrapi, 2003).

1.4 Pre and Post Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

Cinemas are places where members of the society would congregate in order to be entertained by a story that is projected onto a screen. Movies are thus those stories projected on screens and eventually such a place became known as a cinema. These stories now termed as films or movies, are performed by real people who take on roles and characters in order to portray a certain story that would appeal to the viewers or the audience.

Unlike many countries where cinema was used as a mass-entertainment medium, as has happened in the 1900s, Iranian cinema was visited by courtly nobles and the royal family. Cinematography was only used in royal weddings or festivities as a form of entertainment for these aristocrats (Naficy, 1995). The other classes of Iran were deprived of such entertainment until much later. It was reported that the first public screening of a movie took place in 1904 in Tehran at the back of Mirza Ebrahim Khan Sahaf Bashi's antique shop. A year after that, the first movie theater was opened in the national capital of Tehran. However, this act was considered as going against the aristocrats'. Sahaf Bashi, the founder of the movie theater, was arrested a month later and sent to exile. Two years later, a Russian, Russi Khan, managed to open a cinema in Tehran despite the religious contentions as he had close connections with the Royal court (Nayeri, 1993). In 1909, however, with the fall of Mohammad Ali Shah, the king at that time, Russi Khan also lost the support and his cinema was destroyed by the

public. “This, perhaps, was the first instance of censorship in the history of Iranian cinema”, Omid suggests (1995, p.870).

In 1912, movie theaters sprang up with the help of an American-Iranian, Ardeshir Khan. This trend encouraged other Iranians to open more movie theaters (Issari, 1989, p. 61). Ohanian, who offered acting and performance courses to the public, directed his first Iranian movie, *Abi and Rabi* (1929), a comedy which was well received by the public and critics. In the 1920s, Ebrahim Moradi started a new project entitled *Bolhavas* (The Lustful Man). It was a melodrama which was released in 1934 and it received good reviews. However, this film was the last silent film to be created in Iran until the end of World War II.

As a young poet and writer, Sepanta, the father of Persian Talkies, wrote the script movie of *Dokhtar-e-Lore* (The Lor Girl) as the first Persian talking movie to be released. This film was an absolute success and it continued to stay on Iranian screens for more than two years. Sepanta subsequently made four other movies which all dealt with the glorification of the old Iranian culture or the optimistic future of a modern Iran.

The period between 1937-1984 is known as a non-productive period in the history of Iranian national cinema. Several reasons were cited for this: Iran's political crisis generated by World War II; the country's occupation by allies; the undermining of the cinema industry by the establishment; and, the domination of foreign movies, particularly, Hollywood movies (Issari, 1989).

Throughout the Reza Shah era, the first monarch of Pahlavi in the early 1920s, the cinema industry still did not rise to greater heights. The Shah could not understand the importance of a movie industry. It was after the Shah had watched the documentary of the installation of an oil company in Khusestan, a city in the south of Iran, that he

instantly became impressed. He then ordered for the construction of a new movie theater in the poor part of Tehran (Omid, 1995, p. 926-927). This was the emergence of the cinema or film industry in Iran.

In 1940s, imperialism became the focus of the media. It was constantly presented in the media probably because of the physical existence of Western powers in Iran and the cultural domination by allies. Many movie theaters were opened for propaganda purposes to present the news and documentaries. At the time that Iranian movie industry was about to pick up, it appears that the local screens were being dominated by Hollywood productions.

Since a large percentage of the Iranians during that era were illiterate, they were incapable of reading explanatory subtitles contained in Hollywood films. Moreover, many Iranians were also unfamiliar with European languages, and so dubbing seemed the ideal solution for distributors and cinema owners as a means of gaining further profit. Hence, many dubbing studios became established in Iran and these studios resulted in progress of Iranian's sound reproduction.

In 1947, Kooshan, an economist educated in Germany, established a film studio in Istanbul, Turkey. Its first production entitled *Toofan-e-Zendegi* (Storm of Life), a critical social drama, was directed by Ali Daryabegi in 1948 but it was a total failure. The movie received no praise from public and critics as the director and actors had no experience in filming. At the same time, Kooshan also decided and produced another movie, *Zendani-e-Amir* (Amir's Prisoner) which he directed and it was a success. *Sharmsar* (Ashamed) was another production of Kooshan. It was a romantic musical that depicts the story of a village girl who was seduced by an urban man and eventually

ended up in the city. However, she soon recovered from her shock of city life and what she had been through and returned to her village.

Meanwhile Mohsen Badie produced the next blockbuster in the history of Iranian cinema: *Velgard* (Vagabond) in 1952. This movie was a melodrama with moralistic overtones, accompanied by songs and actions with great suspense. "It was the combined box office success of *Sharmsar* and *Velgard* that gave the Persian movie industry a shot in arm and saved it from extinction", Issari (1989, p.136) suggests.

Another Iranian movie, *Ganj-e-Qarun* (Croesus Treasure) initiated a new genre in Iranian cinema industry in 1965. It was directed by Siamak Yasami. The story depicts the worthless and desperate life of the upper-middle class in contrast with the poor and happy working class, which is rich in morals.

Four years after *Ganj-e-Qarun* (Croesus Treasure), Masud Kimiaie made *Qeisar*, a movie which won an award in the 1969 Tehran Film Festival. With *Qeisar*, Kimiaie was able to depict the ethics and morals of the romanticized poor working class of the *Ganj-e-Qarun* genre through his main protagonist. But Kimiaie's movie generated another genre in Iranian popular cinema: the tragic action drama. The 1970s was a special decade for Iranian cinema as it led Iranian cinema to its mature stage. "It was then the regime allowed the directors to make a few movies with critical social themes", Golmakani (1989, p.22) states.

The new political, economic and cultural environment from the mid-sixties to the late seventies had created a unique national cinema that had roots in how Iran perceives art, literature and culture. After the revolution, the mainstream commercial cinema encountered an innovative form of cinema: political cinema which developed its

symbolic language due to a long history of censorship. This new cinema, after the revolution, forced some of the filmmakers of that time, leave the country under political and cultural circumstances (Nayeri, 1993). Those who stayed challenged the new fashion of religious and moral censorship of art and culture.

After the 1979 revolution, the new regime tried to impose 'Fegh', Islamic jurisprudence, in every aspect of Iranian social and cultural life (Mir-Hosseini, 2002). The new regime started to categorize everything as either religiously forbidden, haram, or religiously allowed, halal. Before the revolution, the clerics and religious people had rejected or at best ignored cinema. Even pious families had considered going to the cinema as a sin. After the revolution, the political power which was made up of mostly clergy restricted the cinema industry to religious subjects and ideologies were imposed on the society. There was a period of time where the public presence of women was frowned upon and relationships between boys and girls were highly restricted and this was imposed by the doctrine of fegh (Naficy, 1995).

However, aware of power of the cinema, the Islamic authorities of Iran could not ignore the medium completely as the clergies used to before the revolution. On the one hand, fegh had nothing to say about movies whether it was halal (not forbidden) or haram (forbidden). It seems that the attempt of the supreme leader's regime to bring the entire cinema under the domination of ideology and Islamization did not succeed. From the mid 1980s, Iranian cinema started to attract international attention and filmmakers found more opportunities to express their ideas about the cultural and political views of Iran. However, despite these widespread opportunities, it cannot be denied that the restriction on cinemas had always been there (Mir-Hosseini, 2002).

There were many political changes occurring in 1992. The resignation of Khatami, the president who had laid the foundation of domestic cinema in 1982, the incoming opportunity of free press and cinema showed the new face of Iran to the world. It was during Khatami's presidency that Iranian cinema developed and was unleashed from the controls of those who had fegh-based definition of social realities. There were now, after the revolution, "reformists" who were more tolerant of cultural and political viewpoints. In fact, because of this change and development, Iranian cinema is recognized worldwide and Iranian filmmakers have more freedom to show Iranian social, political and cultural realities both domestically and internationally. One cannot however deny that the Iranian cinema of today owes its attraction to the tradition developed in the pre-revolution era (Issari, 1999).

1.5 Rationale and the Statement of the Problem

According to Wardhough (1986, p.230) "taboo is one way in which a society expresses its disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its member either because of supernatural reasons or because such behavior is held to violate a moral code". Taboos exist and through taboo words, one can understand why people use or refrain from using them. Taboo words also show the values and realities of a society; they also depict what people think about certain issues within that particular society. Taboo words thus reflect a community's customs, religion, metaphysical beliefs and political system (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).

In some countries verbal taboos may include any word which seems rude and impolite to the community regardless of whether that word is linguistically taboo or not (Trudgill, 1974). For instance, words related to bodily functions such as "pee" are considered linguistically taboo (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990). In general, people avoid

using such a word just to avoid being impolite or seen as rude while in some Arab countries, for instance, calling or saying the name of a female relative or family member, particularly one's mother, sister or wife in front of other male relatives is considered a taboo (Qanbar, 2011). However, names are not considered taboo linguistically. As a result, depending on situations, people tend to avoid using some words as a sign of respect and politeness. This is to avoid insulting or harming feelings, attitudes and beliefs. As said earlier, the more such a practice occurs within a family, society and community, the words eventually become taboo and so it leads to the formation of taboos in societies (Mahajan, 1966). With the invention of technology, there has been a complete change of view towards taboo words, particularly among people, who are exposed to numerous languages spoken by different nationalities; who in many ways have different views, customs, social norms and religions. With globalization, it appears that people can readily exchange ideas and as they do this, they somehow also need to adapt themselves to universal changes. For instance, while it used to be a taboo to express certain talks or ideas about sex and relationships, politics, and stigmas in one's family, many people today do not consider these topics as taboo anymore (Seifried 2006). In fact, people especially young people consider these subjects as ordinary. In addition to the Internet, television and satellite, cinemas and various other exposures, people's viewpoints and beliefs have become influenced and consequently how they view certain topics have changed (Vahdat, 2003). Therefore, taboo words and their use in language is influenced and changed by many factors including situational or societal factors such as religious beliefs or participants (Humphries, 1990). This is discussed in this research. It is hypothesized that one way of gauging if this change has occurred is to compare words used in old and new movies. For instance, is it possible that what was once considered as taboo words in the pre revolution time of Iran is no longer a taboo word after the revolution and vice versa?

1.6 The Objectives of the Study

With the hypothesis mentioned above, this study aims to explore the use of taboo words in the Iranian language used in movies regarding two different eras. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To determine whether there are any taboo words/expressions used by the characters in two Iranian movies of different time frames (before and after the revolution).
- ii. To determine the tabooed subjects which those taboo words/expressions are associated with.
- iii. To investigate the frequency of the use of taboo words/expressions regarding the tabooed subjects.
- iv. To examine the social and contextual factors which could have influenced the formation of taboo words/expressions used in the two movies of different time frames.

For this purpose, two Iranian movies were selected. One was made before the revolution and one after the revolution. The rationale for this was to see if the revolution had an impact on the development of these taboo words, if they exist, as used by the movie characters.

In relation to these objectives, the researcher thus aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are considered as taboo words/expressions in the two movies made in different time frames?
- ii. What tabooed subjects are those taboo words/expressions associated with?
- iii. What is the frequency count of the taboo words/expressions used by the movie characters based on tabooed subjects?

- iv. What societal and contextual factors could have influenced the formation of certain taboo words/expressions over this time frame?

1.7 The Significance of the Study

Taboos are inseparable parts of a language since language and culture are inseparable (Wardhaugh, 1998). Although taboo words have always been an interesting subject to linguists, because of their sensitive nature, they have not been much studied. The lack of academic studies on taboo words is more visible in Asian countries, particularly in the Middle East countries like Iran due to their strict social, religious and political atmosphere. With the restrictions placed on Iranian society after the revolution in February 1979 and the structural change of the government from monarchy to Islamic republic, Iranian language, Farsi, has had a dramatic change over the past 32 years (Vahdat, 2003). Hence, it is hoped that this study could enlighten others on how Farsi language has transformed in terms of the taboo words used in two different eras of Iranian society. To observe any linguistic changes in a society, one should normally conduct a diachronic study which requires a long period of time. In this study, however, a comparison of two Iranian movies from two different eras serves as a means of studying the changes in what were considered taboo words then and now. The first movie made pre-revolution called “Qeisar” was made in 1969 by an Iranian filmmaker, Masoud Kimia. This movie is a tragic action drama and it was considered as a new genre in the cinema industry at that time in Iran. The second movie is called “Separation of Nader and Simin” and was made by Asghar Farhadi in 2011. It is also a tragic action drama. These two movies do not reflect all social classes in Iran. Both movies show a fraction of ‘low class’ and ‘middle class’ level of society in Iran. It is hoped that by comparing these two movies, some of the linguistic changes such as verbal taboos used

by the ‘low class’ and ‘middle class’ sectors before and after the revolution could be investigated.

1.8 The Limitations of the Study

It is obvious that all studies are constrained by numerous obstacles and limitations which affect the findings. One of the limitations of this study is the corpus as there was a limited number of taboo words found in the corpus. It was also difficult trying to determine movies which might have the same genre in order to ensure some reliability of research factors and data extraction. Another limitation is that the taboo words examined are confined to Iranian movies and hence restricted to Farsi language and Iranian culture. As all movies are also derived from stories which may or may not be real, there is also the possibility that the taboo words examined may not reflect the actual society. In that regard, the findings of this study can only reflect some aspect of Iranian society only and findings may not be generalized. In addition, the findings of this study are confined to verbal taboo words used in a serious conversation and context as the genre of both movies is tragic action drama. As a result, the findings may vary if a study is conducted on other types of genres such as comedy.

The other limitation regarding this study is that the movie “Qeisar” characterizes only two sectors of the society at that era which is ‘lower’, ‘uneducated’ and ‘traditional’ social class who use a certain way of speaking while the majority of society do not speak that way as it was considered rough by the ‘middle’, ‘slightly wealthy’ and ‘powerful’ class. Similarly, the movie “Separation” indicates two social classes in Iran at the present time, ‘lower class’ who are uneducated with an unstable life and are always struggling with financial issues and the ‘middle class’ who are educated, more

modern families with a stable lifestyle and who basically do not have any financial problems.

Moreover, as Iranian society became a closed society after the revolution (Popper, 1985), there was also media censorship which is strictly controlled by the political powers (Nayeri, 1993). Due to this kind of suppression, it is also possible that in order for the movies to reach the crowd, the movie makers could have deliberately minimized the use of taboo words in the movie “Separation”. Consequently, the frequency of taboo words would be less in comparison as compared to the pre-revolution movie, “Qeisar”. This is because prior to the revolution, the censorship was related merely to political subjects in the movies while after the revolution, the censorship covered many other subjects of the movies including religion, love affairs, and culture (Parhami, 1999).

1.9 The Definition of Key Terms

The definition of certain terms used in this study is now provided.

Taboo

The term refers to what is forbidden to be talked about, touched or behaved according to religion, custom or culture of society (Wardhaugh, 1986).

Taboo words

Taboo words are words that are socially unacceptable to be used in conversation as they are inappropriate for certain contexts (Trudgill, 1974).

Swear words

The term refers to any obscenity words which are viewed indecent in society. These words are used to insult, curse, offend and discredit the addressee (Hughes, 1991).

Unpleasant Concepts

The term refers to any words and expressions that seem unpleasant to the addressees as it is offensive, annoying, insulting or disrespecting to them (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).

Pre revolution

This refers to the time of the monarchy during the reign of Pahlavi dynasty from early 1920s to 1979 (Sepehri, 2000).

Post revolution

This refers to the time after the monarchy regime was wiped out in 1979 and the republic came to power (Sepehri, 2000).

Movies

This refers to the two movies produced before and after the revolution, 1979 in Iran; “Qeisar” and “Separation”.

1.10 The Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, introduction, outlines the background of the study by providing some information about the Iran of two eras: pre-revolution 1920-1979 and post-revolution from 1979 to the present time. The use of taboo words in society was also explicated and the statement of the problem, the aims, objectives, and limitation of the study were also presented. The next chapter reviews the related literature and the underlying theories that would be useful as the basic tools in doing the analysis while the third chapter consists of the description of the research methodology used to obtain and analyze the data in this study. The fourth chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the related theories. Lastly, a summary of the findings and their significance followed by the researcher's interpretation of this study within the context of verbal taboo words used in Farsi language are presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a general definition on taboo. In addition, this chapter will discuss the factors which were considered to have an influence on language and the formation of taboo words, in a particular social structure within a society. Finally, previous studies which have looked at taboo words are discussed and reviewed.

2.1 What is a Taboo?

The term ‘taboo’ came from the Tongan word, *tabu*, but it has also been reported to be related to the Maori word, *tapu*. In the past, the Maori tribal members of higher rank would not touch the belongings of poorer members of the community as they believed their belongings were polluted and unsacred. Likewise, the lower rank was not allowed to touch the belongings of higher rank members of the tribe as their belongings were considered sacred and had spiritual power. As a result, tapu could be interpreted as ‘sacred’, ‘spiritually restricted’ or ‘implied prohibition’.

The use of the word as an English word dates back to 1777 when the British explorer, James Cook visited Tonga. Tonga is a Polynesian state located in the south of the Pacific Ocean. When Captain Cook visited Tonga, the Tongans were preparing to celebrate their annual festival ‘*inasi*’. It is a festival of the donation of the first fruits to the islands’ paramount chief, Tu’i Tonga, says Martin (1817). Cook observed that the Tongans did not sit down or eat anything as they called them tapu which had a very comprehensive meaning signifies that those things were forbidden to be touched or eaten, in general.

According to *The Story of Captain Cook* (Johns, 1870), a taboo was enforced by supernatural sanctions and that if the taboo was broken by anyone, he/she would suffer death, illness or other misfortunes instantly. These beliefs had the greatest impact on certain religious societies. In particular, the use of certain words with religious connotations outside any formal and religious ceremonies was considered taboo. For instance, the word 'bloody' which meant bleeding and stained with blood was first used by Anglo-Saxons. And then it developed to be related to slaughter and bloodshed. For thousand years, this word was taboo in England and it was considered a very bad swear word (Crystal, 2011). However, in 17th century, a London tabloid newspaper criticized George Bernard Shaw's play in which the actress used "Not bloody likely" for the first time in public. In this context, the word 'bloody' meant 'very' or 'a lot' although the newspaper called the word 'bloody' the forbidden word. Since then, using the word 'bloody' has become common in English colloquial speech (Crystal, 2011). It was in 18th century that aristocrats avoided applying the word 'bloody' as it was associated with rowdiness and rough behavior. Dr Johnson (1755) also described the word 'bloody' as 'very vulgar' in his dictionary.

According to the Americana Encyclopedia (Vol.26, 1829:200 e-f), a taboo is something that has been prohibited by a particular group based on the belief that such a word, action or behavior is either too scared to be used by an ordinary individual and so unsuitable for use and if so, the individual can be subjected to some kind of threat or supernatural punishment.

The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (1937, 13-14:502-505) defines taboo as 'a negative sanction whose infringement can result in an automatic penalty without any human or superhuman mediation'. In other words, such an infringement or going

against the regulation can lead to unpleasant consequences. Nonetheless, the concept of taboohood varies from society to society and community to community, in fact, even from individual to individual.

In this regard, it can be said that a taboo word, action or behavior in one society does not necessarily apply to another society. Evidence can be traced to the changes in society today where what used to be seen as taboo decades ago is no longer taboo and what was originally not taboo can become taboo after a certain period of time. A taboo word like 'sex' is no longer perceived to be taboo because of education and exposure to the media. . Such words are used quite openly and freely, unlike thirty or forty years ago. In other words, exposure to other cultures and influence of mass media may also change one's perception about what is considered 'taboo' (see Seifried, 2006).

2.1.1 Sociolinguistic Definition of Taboo Words

Taboos exist in most cultures (De Klerk, 1992). As a result of such taboos came the concept of superstitions and certain beliefs practiced by certain cultures. This kind of practice exists in many cultures. The Chinese for example avoid using 'black' or 'white' during happy events' because they believe that these two colors are not 'lucky. In contrast, they believe that 'red' is the color' of luck. Western society believes that the number '13' is an unlucky number because it is connected to "Friday the 13th" which always brings bad luck. Similarly, based on Iranian's beliefs, Iranians do not stay at home on the 13th day of their New Year (21 March) and go out of their homes to nature as they believe 13 is an unlucky number and by going out, they take the omen and bad luck away from their home on the 13th day of the new year . In general practice, taboo words were "not only considered inappropriate for certain contexts, but were also forbidden in most communicative events" (Trudgill, 1974, p. 29-31). According to

Trudgill (1974), the concept of taboo is related to a particular behavior that a certain community view as socially unacceptable. Such a view or perception could have been caused by certain supernatural beliefs. It could also be due to the possibility that a particular behavior is linked to something that is perceived to be immoral or improper. For instance, Muslims see it as 'taboo' to use their left hand to give something to a person because the left hand is perceived to be a hand that deals with the dirt excreted by the body. The concept of taboo hence deals with behavior which has been prohibited either by some rules and regulations or by practice (Trudgill 1983).

The concept of taboo is further explained by Wardhaugh (1986) who says that taboo is a reflection of a society's disapproval towards a certain kind of behavior which could be harmful to its member due to supernatural beliefs or because such a behavior violates one's moral code.

The concept of taboo was also raised by the famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud (1983) who suggests that taboos and totems of a society may not have any rational justifications. It could have arisen due to a desire to impose a restriction on one's behavior as a means of ensuring humility. Asian parents, for example, never accept any kind of compliments paid to them for bringing up amazing children. In fact, they would subscribe this to 'God', to other things or people but not themselves. Such a practice is to show humility. To affirm that it was not their doing, such parents often choose to downplay themselves by saying how 'small' they are or how 'incompetent' they are even though it is obvious that they had put in a lot of effort. The practice came about because it is taboo among Asian parents to accept such compliments.

It must be mentioned here that taboo words are widespread and include many other forms such as cursing and swearing or in general, bad language (Jay, 1992). Jay (ibid)

believes that taboo words are inevitable ingredient of everyday language and indeed they are a psychological phenomenon. He also states that media like television is blamed for the spread of forbidden words and expressions.

According to Anderson and Hirsch (1985), bad language refers to swearing which in turn includes profanity, vulgarity, cursing, abusive and dirty language. These taboo words are mostly connected with cultural taboos in a society which may refer to religion, morality, physical features, sex and illness (Jay, 2000). These words are usually used by the addresser to express his/her emotion of anger, frustration, hatred and dissatisfaction of a situation.

According to Azzaro (2005), insulting language is targeted for a specific addressee while vulgar language is almost a matter of social class. Normally, it is a judgment of one class of the society over another. Montagu (1967) and Hughes (1991) mention that there was a linguistic contrasts in Augustan and Victorian eras between upper class and lower class families. Upper class used a sedated and clean language while the lower class was not familiar with polite conversation and applied foul expressions in their utterances.

Hence, the researcher concludes that swearing or bad language is considered taboo as it is connected to social and cultural factors of a community and applying swearwords can be considered offensive and insulting.

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Qanbar (2011), in her study, defines a linguistic taboo as any word, phrase or topic that can cause embarrassment and feelings of shame and can provoke a sense of shock when used in public. The use of such a word, phrase or topic can be offensive to a hearer's sensibilities or beliefs. Thus, the use of such a word, phrase or topic becomes an

unpleasant experience which does not only upset the entire circle of people but also makes the persona of the taboo user smaller because in using such a 'taboo' word, he/she has become offensive to the hearers, group, culture or society. Therefore, his/her stature instantly becomes smaller because of this. Most often, such tabooeness like running nude in public or cursing a policeman after you have received a summons on speeding is also normally prohibited under law, religion and culture.

Hongxu and Guisen (1990) suggest that taboos occur because of a sociocultural phenomenon which is associated with superstition, custom or even hierarchical power. They mention that every society prohibits or restricts certain kinds of behaviors and use of particular words, phrases or expressions. This prohibition does not apply to all as the way one culture manages itself differs from another. Usually a taboo develops because one or more individual of a society considers certain acts or behavior as repulsive, offensive or derogatory and when there is consensus, the practice gets carried down from generation to generation and so it becomes taboo after a period of time. In instances of taboo, such acts and things must not be talked about or mentioned, at least publicly. Consequently, expressions or words related to social taboos become verbal or linguistic taboos.

2.2 Classification of Taboo Words

The phenomenon of taboo exists in all the world communities, languages and their presence is not to be denied (Trudgill, 1974). Taboo is a strange phenomenon because it is peculiar to the society that observes such a taboo. Moreover, what is considered as severe by a group of people may be seen as mild for others (Haller, 1976). Hence, the classification of taboo words may vary from one society to the other. It appears that within a particular cultural context, people may speak different languages in different

social contexts but there seems to be some common prohibitions in terms of language and behavior. For as Wardhaugh (1998) says, the culture of a particular community is reflected in the language they use or do not use because they value certain things in life.

Hongxu and Guisen (1990) classify taboo words in Chinese language under four main subjects:

1. Sanctity - which is associated with names or words which are sacred to pronounce or write.
2. Sex - which includes sex organs, sexual behavior and morality.
3. Bodily functions - which represents unclean functions of body such as urinating and defecating.
4. Unpleasant matters like superstitions, misfortunes, death, and certain names of animals and so on.

These four categories of taboo words or usage, on observation, seem to align with Iranian society. In Iranian culture, sex, bodily functions, religious-related topics and other matters such as death and superstitions are considered sensitive topics to be discussed. Hence, the common taboo words in Iranian society like Chinese society (see Hongxu and Guisen, 1990) are mostly associated with one of these subjects. For instance, writing or saying the name of the holy people, like the name of kings in ancient China (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990) was considered taboo and ordinary people were not allowed to use these names. Likewise, writing or saying the name of God and his Prophet in Islamic culture is forbidden.

Another similar example which exists in Chinese and Iranian culture is the death-related words and expressions. Iranians, for instance, do not use words related to death directly as they think talking about death-related subjects is omen and brings misfortune to the speaker and hearer (Edalati, 2012) as it is in Chinese culture (see Hongxu and Guisen,

1990). Words related to sex and bodily functions are also considered taboo and normally are not used in daily communication, particularly in public.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), who performed a study on taboo words in African society, tabooess is one of the social structures in society and this phenomenon is quite clearly reflected in both language and action. Tabooess can be characterized as being concerned with some behavior that is forbidden or regarded as immoral or improper. For instance, the people of Yoruba, the southwestern Nigeria, do not often describe the genitals by their technical terms. Mentioning woman's menstruation by name is also taboo and as before, the authors' claim here supports what Hongxu and Guisen say above. However, the Akindele and Adegbite's (1999) study was restricted to sex and bodily functions and did not cover the wide range of taboo subjects as Hongxu and Guisen (1990) suggested.

It has been observed by Hongxu and Guisen (1990) that in most cases language taboos are often associated with vulgarity, obscenity, insults, rudeness, offensiveness and sacredness. Hence, it can be seen why the use of swearwords and insults are considered as a sort of taboo words. Nonetheless, it is these very words which have been prohibited that would also become the kind of words people use to express their feelings of dissatisfaction towards some situations, people or something (Liedlich, 1973). It seems as if taboo words enable the speaker to express his/her frustrations but yet at the same time, they are disallowed because such words are offensive. This creates a case of dichotomy for the users. It can be noticed how when people are frustrated, they rely on such taboo words (idiot, bastard, nincompoop, lesbian, and so on) to rid themselves of these frustrations. Depending on the ethnic background, many actually use words related to their sexual organs to express frustrations (Fernandez, 2008).

This same line of thinking has been endorsed by Wardhaugh (1986). Wardhaugh categorizes indecent words and phrases into seven main subjects including taboo associated to:

1. Copulative Terms (sex),
2. Human Genitals Terms (bodily functions),
3. Sexual Irregularities Terms (not having a permanent partner for sexual intercourse),
4. Excretory Terms which means to eliminate the solid waste matter from body through the anus,
5. Animal terms which includes certain kinds of animals based on religious beliefs like pig for Muslims, and
6. Death.

All these categories illustrate that most taboo words occur because people do not want to make direct references to specific actions such as excreting waste from the anus, passing urine, or dying and so on. This kind of phenomenon occurs not just because the action itself sounds crude to the hearer, and in some instances, the word can be nauseating (figuratively) for the hearer because these words can conjure unpleasant images. As we can see, Wardhaugh (1986) had almost the same classification for taboo words as Hongxu and Guisen (1990) did but in a more detailed pattern. Hongxu and Guisen (1990) categorized death and certain names of animals under the unpleasant category while Wardhaugh (1986) categorized those taboo words in a separate category. The classification of Wardhaugh (1986) however did not include any taboo words related to sanctity and religious issues. That is one of the reason that the researcher of the current study applied Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) framework for taboo words classification as religion plays an important role in Iranian society.

Another classification of taboo words is presented by Khan and Parviz (2010) that categorize taboo words in Pakistani society into three major groups:

1. linguistic taboos
2. food
3. modesty taboos

According to the authors, language taboos are the prohibitions which forbid people from misusing certain sacred or obscene words associated with sex, body organs and bodily functions. These taboos are associated with strict social code of conduct for a society (Khan and Parviz, 2010). By food taboos they mean what is unfit to eat like horses and hogs. In the definition of modesty taboo words Khan and Parviz (2010) mention to talk about face, ankle, breast or whatever is 'immodest' to reveal according to Pakistani's culture is considered taboo. The authors have not described how these words were developed in Pakistani context but a general deduction would indicate that the Muslim society of Pakistan observes similar rules of modesty, sex and food as other Muslim countries such as Malaysia or Iran. For instance, eating pig is forbidden for Iranians because of their Islamic religious beliefs. Or women are not allowed to wear clothes that reveal their body parts as it is considered 'haram' according to Islamic rules.

2.3 Effective Factors on Formation of Taboo Words

As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, taboo words develop after a society or community decides what is acceptable or not acceptable for itself and this norm has also been articulated by Akindele and Adegbite (1999) who say that taboos as a practice is one aspect of the social structure of that community. Often, this practice is reflected both in language and action. In looking at language, Leech (1964) posits that words are subject to a strict set of rules that have been agreed upon by the speech community based on

their shared values. These words signify a precondition for communication and it implies that language was formulated by human beings for particular use and that the formation of such a language in terms of what was developed was based on the needs of the community. Words were therefore created for the purpose of certain communication needs and a word becomes a prohibited word because it is no longer considered by the community as a good word to be used; or, when the meaning of such a word changes from being pleasant to unpleasant. Since taboos shed light on the social customs, religious and metaphysical beliefs and also the political system of a society, reactions to particular taboo words can also change over time such that some taboo words may lose their original force (Humphries, 1999) and acquire a more diminutive meaning or vice versa.

According to Lakoff (1975), gender plays an important role in the use of taboo words. In most societies, women tend to use more polished refined words than men do. This practice could have been induced by the confines of society which desires that women act as femininely as possible. One aspect of femininity is to refrain from using vulgar language, i.e. language that is considered rough or crude. In contrast, men being leaders of the house and society have been perceived by society over the years to be masculine even if they use vulgar language, a privilege which women are denied. As an example, refer to the latest news report of how the former Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard (see *The Star*, July, 4, 2013) has been described. It is this kind of pressure for women to preserve their image. Thus, it is not surprising to note that in Iranian society, among men a word may not be considered vulgar but it becomes vulgar when used by women (Teymori, 2012). Coates (1986) says that this kind of restriction imposed on women was created by cultural or religious rules because society from early times has this preconceived mind that women's language ought to be more polite than that of men.

One of the factors which can influence taboo words formation is the purpose in using taboo words as Liedlich (1973) suggests. According to Liedlich (ibid) people apply taboo words for various purposes such as:

1. To create attention as the speaker needs to gain attention by applying a strong language that can evoke the listener's response immediately.
2. To discredit someone which seems that people who use taboo words are not pleased with a certain person, authority or government. Therefore, by applying taboo words, the speaker tends to destroy the public image of that person, authority or institutions.
3. To create strong interpersonal identification in order to show what kind of person the speaker is. In some cases, taboo words are used to show the speakers' solidarity and masculinity. As a result, men tend to use taboo words for this purpose more than women as using taboo words show that the speaker has the courage to say those words in public while others do not.
4. To provide catharsis which means to help the speaker to release his/her frustration and passion. As Hughes (1991) mentions, using taboo words might work like a medicine as the speaker can release his/her inner frustration and anger towards someone or something.
5. To provoke a violent confrontation which is considered as "the most effective rhetorical method that is available to agitators for inciting a violent response" (Liedlich, 1973, p.111). When the speaker tends to receive a violent response from the hearer, his/her intention in using taboo words is to provoke violent acts and aggression.

According to Hymes (1972), there are six main factors which lead to the creation of taboo words in speech. Hymes (ibid.) categorizes them as:

1. Setting – it refers to the time and place of speech,
2. Participants – it refers to the users which could be speaker and listener, addresser and addressee or sender and receiver,
3. Ends – it refers to the precise words used and how they are used in the speech,
4. Key- it refers to tone and manner, in which the message was conveyed,
5. Manner - it refers to the participants' behavior towards others such as polite, serious, humorous, formal or informal and
6. Feelings – it refers to the participants' emotions such as anger, sarcastic or shocked, so on.

Since not all societies treat taboo words equally in terms of their intensity in usage and since tabooed items can vary from one society to another or from one culture to another, there must be some distinction one can use to determine taboo words. Trudgill (1986) found that the strongest taboo words in the English-speaking world are still words which are associated with sex, followed by those associated with excretion. In Norway, a Scandinavian society, it was found that taboo words were mostly expressions that are connected with the devil, and in Roman Catholic culture, they are words essentially associated with religion and this claim has been supported by Mbaya (2002).

Another study conducted by Mahajan (1966) points out that two types of laws exist behind the linguistic taboos of a society and they are 1) custom and 2) religious laws. He states that customary law is an important source of law which determines the principals of right and justice and that it measures man's insight and ability and is an expression and realization of the society. Mahajan (1966) believes that religious laws are as important as customary laws in making an impact when observing linguistic taboos. These laws, undoubtedly, were presented by the clergy whether in Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Taoist or Buddhist societies. Inadvertently, such a landscape reflects

that the world of the clergy is patriarchal. In other words, if the clergy created such taboo norms, there could be a prejudice incurred by these men on women and their behavior.

2.4 Other Related Studies

Leech (1964), Allan and Burridge (1991), Douglas (1966), Freud (1950), Holmes (1992) and Steiner (1967) have studied and argued about taboo words from different perspectives encompassing sociology, psychology, and anthropology. For instance, Anderson and Trudgill (1990) studied taboo words from a sociological point of view while Sheidlower (1995) studied taboo words from a lexicographic stance. In addition, many researches and studies have been conducted on linguistic taboos such as study conducted by Hongxu and Guisen (1990) on Chinese taboo words, Salami and Awolowo's (2006) study on taboo words among Nigerian young adults, and taboo words study in Yemeni society by Qanbar (2001). It should be mentioned here that Jay (1992) was the pioneer of studying taboo words in movies.

However, the number of studies done in Muslim countries including Iran has been limited as most taboo words are rooted in people's religious, traditional and political beliefs and viewpoints and these are sensitive topics in these societies due to the strict social and political rules which are imposed on these societies. Iranian society is a closed society according to Popper's (1985) classification of society. Teymori (2012) states that Iranian society has restricted relationships with different tribes and it is still struggling to transform from tradition to modernity. The effects of this trend are seen in Iranian religion, science, policy and morality. Teymori (ibid) explains that there are many limited studies on taboo words in Iran as the majority of taboo words in Farsi are related to religion, political power and sexual behavior and in a closed society like Iran;

a researcher cannot challenge these issues easily. However, studying taboo words in Iranian movies seems less challenging as compared to studying them in a real situation in society.

Wati (2002) conducted a study on taboo words produced by male and female characters in the movie “Boys don’t cry” produced in 1999. She focused on the kinds of taboo words used and how they were linked to certain subjects as used by the movie characters. Her aim was to investigate why male and female characters in the movie used those taboo words. To collect the data for her study, she applied a qualitative-descriptive approach. She used the descriptive approach because it “involves the collection of data which was meant to be used for the purpose of describing existing conditions” (Sax, 1968, p.76). A descriptive approach deals with observation, case-study or survey and it can describe a set of observations or collected data (Jackson, 2009). In other words, the qualitative approach was taken to conduct this research (see Chapter 3, Methodology). Wati (ibid) studied the movie manuscript of “Boys don’t cry” as her corpus. Her observation and insight into the scenes were also taken into consideration as a way of helping her to understand the actual circumstances in which the taboo words occurred. To analyze the data, first, Wati (ibid) combined two main theories presented by Liedlich (1973) and Wardhaugh (1986). These two theories were used by Wati as the framework for her study to classify the taboo words. To identify the purpose of the characters of the movies using those taboo words, Wati applied Liedlich’s theory of purpose (see Section 2.1.3) which was related to five principal purposes of verbal obscenity. Meanwhile, to analyze the factors existing in those communication events, Wati used Hymes’s (1972) theory of communicative events (see Section 2.1.3). From her study, Wati (ibid) concludes that male and female characters of the movie often used the same taboo word, ‘fuck’ with the same taboo subject which was ‘sex’.

Interestingly, the purpose of using taboo words was different for the genders. Males used taboo words for the purpose of identification while females used them to provide catharsis which means to release their intense frustration and passion.

In the current study, Wati's (ibid) approach would be referred to by the researcher. One of the differences between Wati's work and the current study is that Wati (ibid) explored the use of taboo words in one single movie whereas the current study will make a comparison of the taboo words used by the characters in two movies made in two different eras (see Chapter 1, Section 1.6). Another difference is that Wati focused on the purpose of using taboo words while in the current study, the researcher will focus on the factors which lead to taboo word formation in the movies. It is hoped that the findings of this study can fill in a current gap which has not focused on the use of taboo words in Iran and in two eras - pre-revolution and post-revolution.

Another research by Qanbar (2011) attempted to study the linguistic taboos in Yemeni society. Qanbar (ibid) applied Brown (1978) and Levinson's (1987) idea of 'face' and the 'Politeness Theory' to account for the tabooeness of certain words in Yemeni society. Qanbar divided the Yemeni society's taboo words into two main categories: a. context-specific and b. general in which two subcategories were added. Context-specific category was divided into non-taboo words and words related to the hearer's physical and social defects, such as blindness and divorce while the general category was divided into unmentionable and mentionable with minimizers, soft words that are used to replace the taboo words. Qanbar (2011) also discussed why these words were considered taboo in Yemeni society, in what circumstances were they used and what strategies including euphemisms and constructions people apply in order to refrain from using them or to minimize their tabooeness.

In her research, Qanbar recorded 50 conversations of the Yemeni people. The participants were placed into one of these groups: female-female, male-male or female-male talking about different topics. From her findings, Qanbar concluded that the taboo words as used in Yemeni society are closely related to some socio-cultural factors. She also deduced that those taboo words considered shocking in Yemen might not seem bad when compared to other nationalities. For example, calling one's wife and sister's name in front of male family members or other men is taboo in Yemeni culture whereas in America, men can call their wife and sister by name and it is not considered taboo in American culture.

She also mentioned that time could possibly water down the tabooeness of some words. An example of diminishing nature of taboo words was set by Seifried (2006). He stated that taboos, in general, compass a limited number of categories such as bodily functions and sex and are spread through different cultures. However, he compared taboo words in American society in the past and present time and claimed that after Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky and its disclosure in the media, Americans felt more free to use the words related to sexual activities which were taboo previously (Seifried, 2006).

Qanbar also suggested that factors like demographic background and socio-economic situation can also play a role in how people perceive a word to be taboo, and such a phenomenon also applies to Iranian society. More of this will be discussed in chapter four. As Holmes (1992, p. 161) has said earlier, the way one speaks is usually a good indicator of his/her social background, hence, how a word is used, whether as taboo word or not would be able to indicate a speaker's background (see Holmes, 1992). For instance, rural people feel more comfortable than urban people with using words related to sex and bodily functions as they have been brought up in an agricultural environment and they have observed animal sexual behavior (Qanbar, 2011). In terms of socio-economic factor, poor people are more likely to use more taboo words than wealthy

ones. The higher educational background people have, the less the tendency to use taboo words in their speech. Normally wealthy people are educated and brought up with disciplines which make them to behave politely and speak a polite and clean language compared to poor families who are mostly uneducated (Liedlich, 1973). As an example, in a home where there is only one room for all the members of the family and children, there is a higher possibility that these children may have observed their parents' sexual relationship. Due to this frequency, it is therefore possible that references to sexual and excretory organs and sexual activities may be common and casual among these family members (Apte, 2001). Nonetheless, the reverse may be true because children, in most societies are often prohibited from using words which only adults can use.

Coupland, et al (2003) state that the kind of relationship that exists between the participants may also permit or disallow the use of taboo words and in the sociolinguistic theory of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) have shown that the relationship of two participants can affect the degree of politeness they have for each other during conversations. The authors have indicated that in some cases, the closer the intimacy of two participants, the less polite their conversation to each other is. This could be interpreted as saying that the more the interlocutors are intimate, the more they would feel free to use taboo words between themselves. The socio-cultural factors which Coupland et al. (2003) mention in their study is probably something that is fairly common and prevalent in most societies and countries today. Iran, as a Muslim country, with a wide demographic and socio-economic gap may provide a good background for such studies to be conducted.

Hongxu & Guisen (1990)'s study of taboo words in China looked at the linguistic taboos of Chinese society. Their study looked at taboohood in two categories, linguistic

and non linguistic forms. Hongxu and Guisen (1990) believe that taboos are sociocultural phenomenon. They mention that taboos are a set of prohibitions that are connected to customs, political power and superstitions. When a particular act is considered taboo in a society, the names of those things and acts would be taboo too and the community cannot mention them, at least in public. This broad category includes vulgarity, insults, rude language, offensive language and obscenity. As a result, they considered socio-cultural factors which could affect linguistic taboos and they focused on elements such as superstition, custom and power. They then categorized their taboo words into 'macrolinguistic' and 'microlinguistic'. To do their study, the authors considered Malinowski (1998)'s social view of language, Halliday's (1976) notion of register, Hyme's (1974) concept of speech events and Fishman's (1991) idea of lawful conversations as a contextual framework for the analysis of their data. By macrolinguistic taboo words, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) meant words which are considered unpleasant to all people and this includes words like sex and death.

In looking at the microlinguistic taboos, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) focused closely on elements which are related to the context in which they are used and this encompass the participants themselves, their age, gender, social status and relationship to each other. They believed a linguistically non-taboo word may convert to a taboo word in a particular situational factor and vice versa. The researchers also looked at the purpose of the conversation, subject matter, setting (formal and informal situation) and finally, medium. However, they did not explain how they collected the data in Chinese language and what approach they applied for data collection.

Through the macrolinguistic and microlinguistic filters, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) were able to designate linguistic taboos as absolute taboo or quasi-taboo, a word which is not taboo but avoided by the speaker in a particular micro-context. Eventually, they also concluded that social, situational and contextual factors can affect the tabooeness of

some words. Unlike Qanbar (2008), Hongxu and Guisen (1990) categorized taboo words in relation to the two main groups of factors which form a taboo in a society.

Qanbar (2008), in contrast, categorized the taboo words based on people's social customs, religion, metaphysical beliefs and political rules. She drew her conclusions by identifying what factors could affect these taboo words in each category. Hongxu & Guisen's (1990) findings indicate that taboo words in Chinese society were drawn from two social levels, the upper class and lower class and it is possible that Iranian society may also have such a similarity. (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4).

In looking at verbal taboos within the social media such as TV and radio, Gorska (2004) focused on the Polish and English people by comparing their linguistic politeness/impoliteness strategies. Gorska (ibid) focused on two animated series. His aim was to study the impoliteness in Polish language by making a comparison to American English. The Polish series revolved around the everyday lives and adventures of four boys who played in a play ground without the parents' observation. The American animated series was also about four boys and their daily adventures but this series was intended more for a mature adult audience. It was also a series that was well-known for its crude, dark and surreal language. In this study, Gorska (ibid.) used the corpus of the series as the source of his data. He observed what politeness/impoliteness strategies were used by the characters. From his findings, Gorska (2004) concluded that the politeness framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) failed to be useful in some situations. To overcome this weakness, he referred to Culpeper's (1996, 2005) politeness theory. This was used mainly in looking at the conflict talk which was a norm for the communication between the characters and the boys who engaged in taboo language as a form of communication. The researcher also studied the cultural differences by comparing Polish and American language use in

terms of the strategies used in conveying politeness and impoliteness. Despite the various approaches Gorska (2004) had used in analyzing the data which were accessed from two animated series, it appears that his findings could be flawed in some aspects, in this case, lack of reliability. This is because firstly, the audiences of these two TV programs, in Gorska's (ibid) case were of two different age groups, children and adults. This factor hence provides a wide disparity in terms of the language used. It cannot be denied that, adults' perception of tabooess varies from that of children due to factors such as age, social status and gender. Secondly, as the genre of the series is comedy, the findings would differ if it was studied in other genres like action or romance, hence, there is a possibility that taboo words were deliberately employed for a specific consequence for instance, to increase 'humor'.

In another study of tabooess, Hewitt (2010) carried out a study on bathroom graffiti and GP (General Practitioner) consultation where many items were used to refer to genitalia and where such instances were also considered as taboo and impolite. Hewitt (ibid) collected her data from the graffiti which were written on toilet doors and from the conversations exchanged in general practice consultations. She used a sound recorder to record the conversation between the general practitioner and the patient. However, she did not indicate in her study whether she was present at the consultancy herself or whether she considered the age, gender and social status of the patients in her study. Hewitt (ibid) believed that both toilet and consulting rooms could serve as restricted areas for the addresser in which context-specific behavioral norms was applied. In this study, Hewitt (2010) applied Bousfield and Culpeper's (2008) theory of (im) politeness in analyzing her data. Her data showed how the contrasting situational norms of the two contexts, toilets and consulting room, may have affected the local notion and interpretation of taboo language. However, the reliability of her data was

also affected since in graffiti, the nature of person including age, gender, social status who had used the taboo word was not stated whereas the participants age, sex and educational background in the GP's consultation sessions were known. In this regard, it is possible that the inadequate information with regards to the graffiti owners' gender, age and social status may also have had an impact on the kind of taboo words used. Further, there is also likelihood that what is spoken and written may have some differences too.

Pang Chor (2009) conducted a research on the use of linguistic taboos by speakers of English in Hong Kong. She believed that a taboo concept can have positive and negative aspects. She suggested that the more a linguistic expression emphasizes negative aspects, the more that expression bears tabooess. She considered Dewaele's (2004) study who believed people have different perception of taboo words. Dewaele (2004) was the first person who studied the 'strength' of words, a scalar system which compared emotional force of taboo words. Pang Chor (ibid) studied people's reaction and the degree of their tolerance to linguistic taboo words by applying Dewaele's (2004) scalar system. In addition, she went on to categorize these taboo words in relation with taboo concepts including 'death', 'poverty', 'race', 'sex' and 'body' by applying Hongxu & Guisen's (1990) framework. As it is seen in her study, she replaced Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) 'sanctity' category by 'race' category. She applied a quantitative analysis approach. She collected the data through a questionnaire of closed questions. The 18 participants were supposed to rank the taboo words in 5 different categories from 1-9 in the scale, from the lower degree of tabooess to a higher degree. On analyzing the data, she concluded that women used fewer verbal taboos in three of the given categories as compared to men with the exception of the category 'poverty'. Generational differences between the speaker and addressee affected this phenomenon

and the PerApt (Perceived Acceptability) of the use of taboo increased when the age difference got larger. However, gender had a minimal effect on the use of tabooed words in her study. In comparison to Pang Chor's (2009) study and the current study, it must be mentioned that Pang Chor (ibid) focused only on microcontextual (situational) factors suggested by Hongxu & Guisen (1990) in forming taboo language. Amongst those micro-context factors including participants, purpose of conversation, setting, content and medium, she investigated participants merely as one of the factors affecting the use of verbal taboos. She considered their age, gender and social status to conclude the linguistic taboo phenomenon among people who speak English in Hong Kong. However, the current study will consider both microcontextual (situational) and macrocontextual (societal) factors (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4) which may affect the formation of taboo words regarding two Iranian social classes presented in the movies.

In Iranian context, it was found that a study on taboo words in Farsi had been conducted by Bakhtiar (2011). He tried to examine how social and contextual factors such as "gender" and "formality of situation" could determine the offensiveness level of a concept. He also looked at the use of euphemisms in Farsi. He applied Allan & Burrige's (2006) pragmatic approach to euphemisms to show how x-phemistic value of words (Allan and Burrige, 2006) in Farsi are affected by particular situational context. Bakhtiar (ibid.) organized the x-phemisms into three groups: 'euphemism', 'orthophemism' and 'dyphemism'. According to Allan and Burrige (2006), euphemisms and orthophemisms are words or phrases used to avoid taboo words. A dyphemism is a word that has an offensive connotation (Allan and Burrige, 2006). Bakhtiar surveyed 30 Iranian men and women, aged between 20 to 30 years old. Their views on 15 words and expressions indicating the concept of 'prostitute' ranging from highly euphemistic to complete taboo were obtained based on the circumstances stated in the questionnaire.

The participants were allowed to choose whether the word is '*polite*', '*neither polite nor necessarily impolite*' and '*offensive*'. In the second part of the questionnaire the participants should imagine themselves sitting in a cafe discussing the topic of 'prostitution' with a very close friend and they could choose one of the three options of '*polite*', '*neither polite nor necessarily impolite*' and '*offensive*' by considering the current situation. To analyze his data, Bakhtiar (2011) applied statistical methods. From his findings, he deducted that in formal situations, both genders believed that the slang for the word "prostitute" is taboo and offensive or dyphemistic. However, in informal situations the words were considered not taboo or orthophemistic or they were euphemistic. He also concluded that women, in general, considered more words to be taboo or offensive and dyphemistic than men would. The difference between Bakhtiar's (2011) study and the current study would be that the taboo words chosen by him is on one theme, prostitution, in three particular situations while the current study focuses on a number of themes and situations.

Khan and Parviz (2010), in their study of taboo words in Pakistani society define taboo as a strong social prohibition against words, objects, actions, discussions or people that are considered undesirable or offensive by a group, culture or society. They mention that some taboo activities or customs are prohibited under law and transgressions may lead to severe penalties (see Taboo Classification in this chapter). They also add that other taboos that are violated may result in embarrassment and shame and be seen as offensive and that such behavior may be looked down by others. An example of taboos in Pakistani society is calling one's spouse by name. Pakistanis never call their wife or husband by their name. It is also taboo if newly married couples talk to each other in the presence of parents, as Khan and Parviz (2010) mention in their study.

According to Kamal (2008), folkways and mores play an important role in establishing good and bad things in a society. As social norms and values and beliefs change, they affect language and ultimately, linguistic taboos. The notion of diminishing taboo in Pakistan was examined by Khan and Parviz (2010) who believed that verbal taboos reflect norms and values of a society. Using Trudgill's (1978) framework which believes that the physical environment (normally in the structure of its lexicon) as well as the social environment (structure of the vocabulary) is reflected in its language (1987), their study focused on beliefs and values of a society. Khan and Parviz (ibid) applied a qualitative and quantitative method to collect their data. The participants were 80 Pakistanis of two different age groups, 40 of them were between 50-60 years old (older generation) and 40 of them were between 20 to 30 years old (younger generation). Fourteen common taboo words in the Pakistani language were selected and given to respondents in the form of close-ended, yes/no questionnaire. They then applied a statistical test, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and searched for the means of the data and analyzed their significance ratio. Comparing the F value of the two groups, their findings suggest that there is a diminishing trend in what is considered taboo in Pakistani society. For instance, naming the spouse was considered a taboo by 80% of elderly participants whereas only 35% of the young respondents considered it a taboo. They then concluded that taboos related to religious laws were changing at a slow pace while taboo items related to customary laws, social gatherings; opposite sex interactions and language used in the presence of elderly people are all changing rapidly. They also suggested that there is a huge difference between the young and old generations' attitudes towards taboohood. It also appears that the young used more verbal taboos as compared to the older generation. However, this study lacks the participants' gender comparison as in societies like Pakistan there is a considerable difference between male and female's perception of taboohood. Religious beliefs also play an

important role in these kinds of society, a factor which has not been exploited by the researchers.

Another more recent study of tabooeness was conducted in 2010 by Gutama. Her aim was to study the abusive language used in the movie called “The Fast and Furious” made in 2001 and how abusive language was formed, what it means and what its function could be once a person uses it. Gutama (2010) applied the framework presented by Hughes (1998) which suggests that abusive language, also termed swearwords, could be categorized into six categories and that they can be related to gender, excrement, animal, personal background, mental illness and sex activities. The data needed for this study was gathered by a qualitative method and the researcher focused on the script of “The Fast and Furious” movie. The utterances used by the characters of the movie which included abusive language were then recorded and identified and twelve words were described as abusive language. Hughes’s (1991) framework was engaged in order to identify the forms of abusive language. The Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962) was next used to determine their meanings and function. The author concludes that the twelve abusive words in the movie were those related to excrement, mental illness, sex organs, sex activity and name of animals. In terms of the meanings of the swearwords used, the researcher observes that the usage varied in terms of situations. In the functions identified, it was found that swearwords were used to express anger, degrade someone, call someone by a word rather than their real name such as monkey, and to indicate sexual relationship. This particular study focused on the use of abusive language which was also considered as taboo words. The nature of abusive language differs from one culture to another; hence, the findings cannot be generalized.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has defined taboo and examined factors which influence the formation of taboo words, the application of taboo words in language and how, in some cultures, taboo words can appreciate (increase) in intensity or use or depreciate (decrease) in intensity or use. This chapter also looked at how religion, political system, culture and beliefs of a community can determine taboo words or non-taboo words of a word. In addition, the chapter also attempted to discuss some of the studies which have been conducted on the use of taboo words. In doing so, it highlighted the approaches and theoretical constructs applied by the various researchers. To some extent, their strengths and weaknesses were also highlighted. In that regard, what was found to be taboo in one community may not apply to another community because of the fact that factors such as social – cultural factors, gender and age, religious beliefs and values can all affect the intensity and how words may be perceived to be very taboo, not so taboo or not taboo at all.

There has been no research done, thus far, on taboo words used in Iranian movies in two eras. This research thus aims to study verbal taboos used in two Iranian movies made before and after revolution (1979) in an effort to fill in that gap. In addition, it will also focus on two social classes existing in Iranian society pre and post revolution (see Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3).

The next chapter will explicate the methodology used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers six sections which describe the approach applied in conducting this study, the background of the movies and their synopses, the criteria used for the selection of the movies, the extraction and transcription of data, the framework for data analysis and the presentation of data.

3.1 The Approach of the Study

This study was conducted in order to describe the phenomenon of taboo words used by movie characters in two Iranian movies from two time frames. The aim was to especially focus on the lives of two social classes in Iranian society before the revolution and after the revolution; lower class families and middle class families. There is a 42-year old gap in the time frame which stretches from before the revolution (1969) to after the revolution (2011). In this regard, it is possible that there will be some changes and evolvement in how these two classes live (see Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3) and such changes may have had an impact on the development and use of language, in particular, taboo words, among members of Iranian society. As a Muslim country, it is possible that some aspects of the Islamic religion, the main religion of the country, have influenced the people and their behavior (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Due to this possibility, it is also possible that members of Iranian society may or may not have more taboo words to use or avoid over time i.e. pre and post the revolution.

As a study that attempts to understand how language is used, particularly by two classes of Iranian society, the research design of this study will inevitably be qualitative in nature. In a qualitative approach, the researcher studies phenomena in their natural context and then interprets the findings to give a deep understanding and description of

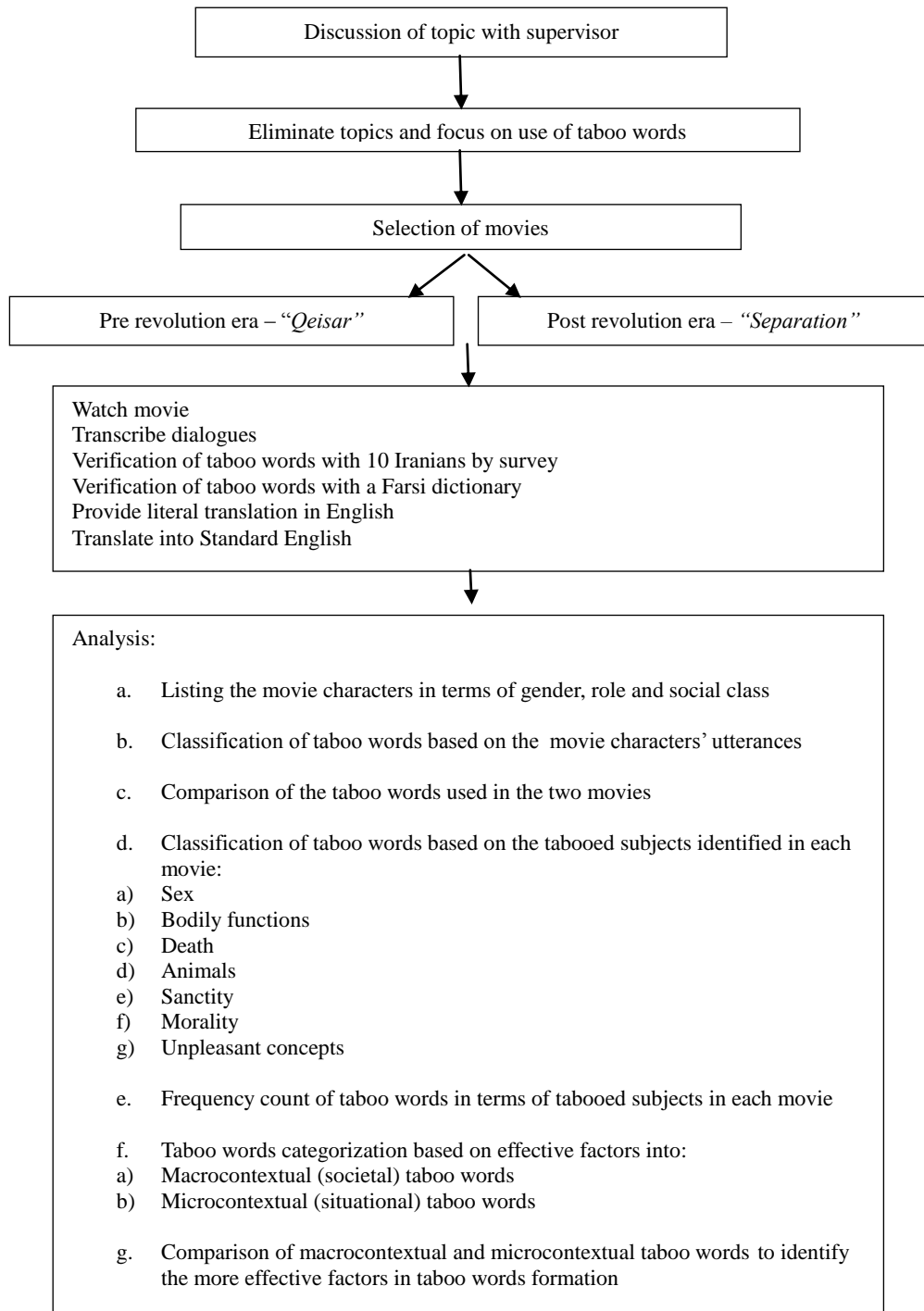
the research subject (Denzin, 1994). As the aim is to unravel how language use may develop taboo words within two levels of social classes, it is also necessary that the nature of the analysis of this study will be descriptive. Data was extracted by the researcher based on her watching the movies and from her transcriptions of conversations made by the movie characters. For the purpose of ensuring the validity and reliability of the collected data as proposed by Jackson (2009), the researcher attempted to verify the 'tabooness' in the words by asking the opinions of 10 other Iranians who are in different age groups born before and after the revolution and from lower class and middle class families with different educational background (see Appendix B). These taboo words identified by the researcher will be further substantiated by making reference to three dictionaries, Dehkhoda (1931) as the first extensive Farsi dictionary in fifteen volumes, Haim, the father of bilingual dictionary in Iran (1996) and Arianpour (1991) which are the most valid and extensive bilingual dictionaries (Saadat Noury, 2004).

Language is an ever revolving tool of communication. What was used today may turn obsolete in less than a decade. Therefore, it is important to determine how words may be used within a social context and in different time frames. To attempt to put the findings into numbers and statistics for the purpose of making them credible will not suit a study of this nature because the aim is to understand the process of human beings living with each other, how they function among themselves and how tabooness evolves. Hence, this study is developed for the purpose of making meanings out of the social context of two Iranian social structures.

As spoken data are rich with nuances, tones, emotions and embedded meanings, using the qualitative approach is the most appropriate in this context. In this regard, the corpus that would eventually serve as the basis of the data in this study would be the

transcriptions of the conversations or dialogues extracted from the two Iranian movies. As all spoken words are articulated from the emotions experienced by the speakers, it is also inevitable that analysis may be subjective in this context. Nonetheless, to ensure that there is reliability and validity in terms of the data analyzed, the researcher, who is also an Iranian, will thus verify some of her analysis of the taboo words used by the movie characters by confirming with other Iranians (see Appendix B). She will also use the Dehkhoda dictionary (1931), to confirm the meaning of the words in Farsi and to check if they have a negative connotation. As is the case with all research endeavors, it is not possible to close all gaps that could weaken the research, hence it is hereby mentioned that the researcher will take all steps necessary in order to ensure that the process of this study is systematic and easily replicated. For this purpose, a chart depicting the process is provided in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1: Steps into doing the study



3.2 Background of the Movies and Their Synopses

Selection of the two movies:

The core of this study is made up of two Iranian movies produced before and after the revolution in Iran. This study is conducted in order to find out whether the words used by the characters were taboo or not considering that there are two social structures, lower class families and middle class families, co-existing in Iranian society. This research was also conducted in order to study which factors are most likely to affect the formation of taboo words. To select the movies for this study, the researcher watched many movies produced before and after the revolution to ensure that both movies have the same genre, as a way of maintaining consistency. Since tabooeness is often related to a more serious nature of language use, the criteria for selecting the movie also focused on movies with a serious nature or plot in action that could have conversations reflecting the two social structures in Iranian society. As a way for making comparisons, the criteria applied to select the movies also included:

- a) One Pre revolution movie
- b) One Post revolution movie
- c) Each movie must have won an award to illustrate their popularity and quality
- d) Background of the movie needs to be a tragic- action
- e) The plot of the movies had to comprise the life of the two classes- the lower class and the middle class (see Chapter 1, Section 1.7).

Movie 1 – Pre-Revolution Era – “Qeisar”

The first movie “Qeisar” was made in 1969 by Masud Kimiai. This movie was produced before the revolution in Iran in 1972. The movie was considered a turning point for Iranians then because it created a new trend for the society through the development of the cinema industry. The director of the movie, Masud Kimiai generated

a new genre which was called “tragic action drama” and the movie carried a “revenge theme”. It was also a prize-winning production at that time (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4). The researcher had to download the movie from YouTube as first of all, there was no copy of this movie available in the market and all movies produced before the revolution in Iran have been banned from sale after the revolution.

Synopsis

In this movie, the story centered around a young girl called Fati, from a lower-class family. Coming from such a background, unpleasant things were experienced by Fati who was first raped and impregnated by her friend’s brother, Mansour Abmangol. Fati became ashamed and committed suicide. As is the norm for most crime in tragic movies, the culprit in this plot belonged to the middle-class family of the time. Members from this class were more likely to ‘get away’ from their crime and this raises a sense of injustice. In contrast, people from lower classes usually have no defense and no way of protecting themselves (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). Consequently, they become even more suppressed and the movie depicts this. Out of shame and stigma, Fati took her own life. Her older brother, Farman, who was an ex-street thug, a normal case of delinquency happening among lower class children, ran a butcher shop, another stereotypical occupation that only lower class people had (see Chapter 1, section 1.2). He too felt oppressed. When he got to know why his sister had committed suicide, Farman decided to take revenge. In the fight, Farman was stabbed by the more powerful Mansour and his brothers. As most societies seem to demonstrate, even today, the middle class are often better off in many ways, they seem to have greater physical strength because of better food, they seem to be better informed because they had the resources and they have better contacts as can be seen in most economic landscapes. As the plot unfolds, Farman’s brother, Qeisar, who returns home after years working in the

south finds out why his siblings died. Like Farman, Qeisar also swears to take revenge on the three brothers from the middle class family. He then goes on to kill Karim and Rahim, two of Mansour's brothers. When Qeisar's mother finds out that her son, Qeisar, had killed Mansour's two brothers and is also seeking Mansour's death, she dies of heartbreak. This tragic event aggravates the situation even more. Qeisar determines Mansour's whereabouts through Mansour's girlfriend, Soheila. Out of the desire to avenge his family he impregnates Soheila. Qeisar then finds Mansour the next day and kills him but Qeisar was eventually shot by the police. Thus ends the story of the people from the lower class fighting the people from the middle class.

The next movie is a post revolution movie.

Movie 2 – Post- Revolution Era – “Separation”

The second movie, “Separation” was produced in 2011 by Asghar Farhadi and it also became an Oscar Prize winner. The movie is also a ‘tragic-drama action’ which reflects Iranian society that is divided by gender, generation, religion and social class. The researcher obtained an original copy of this movie from Iran to watch.

Synopsis

The story is about a married couple and their teenage daughter. In this movie, the mother, Simin who belongs to a middle social class family and can afford going abroad, wants to leave the country with her daughter, Termeh. However, her husband, Nader, insists on staying in Iran because he wants to take care of his elderly father who suffers from Alzheimer. Nader represents a typical middle class who always respects his parent and tries to support them. To make Nader agree with leaving Iran, Simin offers him two options; divorce or to permit his daughter to travel abroad. It should be mentioned here

that according to the Iranian government's law, a woman has to have an official permission from a male member of the family like father or husband to be allowed to travel abroad. As a middle class family, the individuals are more open minded and women enjoy more equality of rights than women in lower class families which are more inclined to follow traditions (Ramazani, 1993). The right of divorce is generally the right of men, but women in some circumstances can be equal to men with regard to this right. Here again women from the low class families suffer inequality because of their social restrictions, illiteracy and poverty. The crisis begins when Simin leaves her family for her parent's home as her family can support her emotionally and financially. In return, Nader hires a young woman named Razieh, to look after his father. Razieh was born to a lower class family who were struggling to earn money. Most work such as cleaning belong to the lower class as they are not educated enough to have well-paid jobs and this is depicted in the movie (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Razieh is afraid to tell her husband that she is working in a separated (single) man's house and this leads to a conflict between the two families when her husband finds out. Razieh's husband, an unemployed neurotic man, represents a typical lower class man who is not able to find a job and who has many debts and several criminal records. In lower class families, the man is the breadwinner and the head of the family and if the woman provides money, the husband would be insulted (Satrapi, 2003). Women are not allowed to work unless they have their husband's permission and, this is depicted in the movie. Initially, Razieh tries to hide from her husband that she is working. Another issue which is seen is the traditional and religious beliefs of lower class families towards women in contact with strange men. According to Islam it is *haram* (forbidden) for a woman being alone with a strange man in a house or a room- no matter what the reason is (Abdullah, 1989). This is why Razieh was afraid to tell her husband that she was looking after an old man

whose son is separated from his wife. In this movie, everyone lies to save somebody or something in their lives.

3.3 Process of Data Collection:

Watching the Movies:

The two movies were played separately and were watched a few times to ensure that the sound quality and the clarity of the movies were intact and could be used for data transcription. It was also necessary to find out whether these two movies contained sufficient data that could be extracted for the purpose of analysis. To ensure that a good movie had been selected, the researcher also read movie reviews to have an understanding of the background, the genre, the story and morals as well as what particular characteristics each movie had to win an award as an award demonstrates the quality of the movie.

The researcher then used recording equipment as the first step to view the movie. In the need to validate the reliability and validity of the data, prior to transcription, the writer also observed the body movements of the characters involved in the movies, the setting was also closely studied and each character and their relationship with each other in the movies were also given focus in order to ensure that analysis was not biased. As the researcher watched and observed the characters, she also confirmed her findings with ten (10) other Iranians (see Appendix B) who were mostly educated in language-related fields so as to minimize any biasness or prejudice.

Transcription:

After the movies were selected and attentively listened to for the dialogues, the researcher had to select the taboo words/expressions. They were written down as they were used by the movie characters. Since the main language of the movies was Farsi,

the dialogues were first written in Roman alphabets. This process was done continuously until data from both movies were completed.

Then the same set of data was translated once literally and then using equivalent meaning in English. An example of the taboo words and expressions transcribed in Farsi, first translated literally then to Standard English is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

The Movie			
Characters	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Qeisar	Naa looti! Bi marefat!	Not a looti/ man! Without knowledge!	Coward/ rogue/ scoundrel! Unscrupulous!

Figure 3.2: Taboo Words Classification

The taboo words/expressions which were identified as used by the movie characters were then confirmed for their meanings by referring to the most extensive Farsi dictionaries published, Dehkhoda Dictionary written by Ali Akbar Dehkhoda in 1931. For ensuring some degree of validity, the taboo words identified were further verified with ten (10) other Iranians from different age groups, social classes and educational background (see Appendix B).

Verification of taboo words:

To have a deep understanding of the taboo words used in Iranian context, and also to increase the reliability and validity of the collected data, the researcher also conducted a brief survey in order to ensure that the words and expressions identified were equally considered as taboo by other Iranians. The participants were ten (10) Iranians from different age groups with different educational background. Some were born before the revolution and had the experience of living in Iran before and after the revolution, like the researcher herself. Some were born after the revolution and have only experienced

living in Iranian society after the revolution (see Appendix B). Each participant was given the list of the words and expressions recorded by the researcher to be marked as taboo or non-taboo. In this survey, seven (7) out of the ten (10) participants agreed that those words identified were taboo in Farsi. Interestingly, six out of the seven participants were born before the revolution and one was born after the revolution. In contrast, three (3) participants out of the total ten (10) who were born after the revolution disagreed that some of the words taken from the movie “Qeisar” made before the revolution were taboo (see Appendix B). Some participants, however, disagreed with taboohood of some words and expressions used in the movie “Separation which was made after the revolution. To the researcher, it might be a sign which indicates how the idea of taboohood has changed in Iranian society over time.

In this study, it can also be said that, the researcher, as an Iranian is applying a small degree of ethnography in trying to study the use of taboo words/expressions in the two movies. The researcher is Iranian, about 39 years old, and the fact that she was born and grew up in the pre-revolution also gave her an idea of how the society of Iran was during the period before the revolution. In addition, her experience in serving the country of Iran since the post revolution era allows her a window to gauge how the two classes in Iranian society have evolved.

Translation of Taboo Words and Expressions:

After verifying the taboohood of the uttered words in the two movies through a valid Farsi dictionary, Dehkhoda (1931), and via a survey conducted with ten (10) Iranians, the researcher then used two most extensive and valid bilingual (Farsi-English and English-Farsi) dictionaries. Haim Dictionary was written by Soleyman Haim in 1929-31 and is the first bilingual dictionary published in Iran revised in 1996 and Arianpour

Dictionary written by Amir Hosayn Arianpour in 1991, to provide the real meaning of the taboo words/expressions in English. The literal meaning of the taboo words are first provided. However, data analysis used the Farsi definition of taboo words/expressions because in some cases, referring to the English translations would not make the taboo words look taboo (see Chapter 1, Section 1.8).

For this purpose, for the translations, the researcher at times resorted to her knowledge as an Iranian and her exposure to English cultures as a L2 speaker. The example of the translations of the taboo words is shown in Figure 3.3.

Characters	Word Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Nader	Bar pedaret.	Upon your father.	Damn your father.

Figure 3.3: The Translation of Taboo Words

3.4 Framework Applied to Data Analysis

As explained in chapter 1, taboo words are words prohibited and forbidden because they are associated with a society's religion, customs or beliefs which provoke unpleasant reactions (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). In the context of this study, taboo words, therefore, are the words which seem unpleasant, rude, insulting and vulgar in Farsi language because they are against the culture, religion, traditions or social norms of Iranians.

To analyze the data, the researcher applied Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) framework to categorize the taboo words into categories. The authors had suggested a contextual framework to analyze taboo words in Chinese language. They believed that they could separate linguistic taboo words from non-linguistic taboo words through macrocontextual (societal) factors as many words are not taboo unless they are affected by one of the social factors such as culture or religion. The reason why this study

applies Hongxu and Guisen's framework was because the researcher found many similarities between Chinese and Iranian taboo words. For instance, many of the taboo words common in Chinese were associated to sanctity and this seems to be the case in the religious Iranian society as well. The other reason for using this framework was that Hongxu and Guisen (1990) had studied the factors which affected the formation of taboo words in Chinese society. They showed that a socially non-tabooed word can behave like a taboo in a particular social context (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).

However, there is a limitation in Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) study as they did not explain the approaches they had used to collect the data. The researcher decided to apply Hongxu and Guisen's (ibid) framework in order to investigate what factors influenced the tabooeness of some words before and after the revolution and to compare and see which factors were more effective in the formation of those taboo words, the societal factors or situational factors.

3.5 The Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the researcher needed to categorize the taboo words and expressions according to Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) framework of taboo words classification. The steps carried out by the researcher are explained below.

Listing the Movie Characters:

To begin with, the researcher categorized the characters in each movie in terms of their gender, role and the social class in which the movie characters were portrayed in the movies. This was done to facilitate the explanation of the findings on the movie characters. The sample of this categorization is illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Name of character	Gender	Role in movie	Social class
Naneh	Female	Fati's mother	Lower class
Farman	Male	Fati's elder brother	Lower class
Mansour	Male	The rapist	Middle class

Figure 3.4 The List of Movie Characters

Classification of Taboo Words According to Utterances:

At this stage, the researcher classified the taboo words/expressions uttered in the movies according to the respective characters. Figure 3.5 shows the sample of such classification.

The Movie "Qeisar"			
Characters	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Naneh	Che khaaki be saram shod! Che khaaki be saram konam? Khaak bar saram!	What earth/soil has been put on my head! What earth/soil should I put on my head! Earth/soil on my head!	How can I help it! What on earth can I do? Alas for me!
Farman	Bi marefataa! Naa looti! (2)	Without knowledge/without insight! Not a looti/ forgiving!	Unscrupulous! Rogue/ scoundrel!

Figure 3.5 Taboo Words Classification According to Utterances

Classification of Taboo Words Based on Tabooed Subjects:

According to Hongxu and Guisen (1990), there were four major categories for tabooed subjects in Chinese language: (1) sex, (2) sanctity, (3) bodily functions, and (4) unpleasant matter (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). They categorized 'death' under the 'unpleasant matter' category. However, as the analysis suggested, the researcher needed to separate 'death' from the 'unpleasant matter' category and add it to the main categories of tabooed subject. Meanwhile, the researcher added the 'animals' and 'morality' to the list of tabooed subjects and replaced the Hongxu and Guisen's (1990)

‘unpleasant matter’ category by ‘unpleasant concepts’ based on her observation of the two Iranian movies.

A sample table is given below in Figure 3.6 to illustrate how this is done.

Taboo Category	Word extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Sex	None	None	None
Bodily functions	Shashide too khodesh.	He has pissed in himself.	He has pissed in his pants.
Death	Khaak bar saram!	Earth/soil on my head!	Alas for me!
Animals	Az sag kamtari.	You are less than a dog.	You are as invaluable as a dog.
Sanctity	Az khoda bi khabar!	Unaware of God existence!	Atheist!
Morality	Naa mard!	Not a man!	Coward/ cowardly!
Unpleasant concepts	Kesaafat!	Dirt/ filthy!	Dirt/ filthy!

Figure 3.6 The Seven Categories of Tabooed Subjects: Adapted from Hongxu and Quisen 1990

Frequency of Usage of Taboo Words:

After classifying each taboo word according to the taboo subjects, a frequency count of each kind of taboo words/expressions used in each movie to show which category included the majority of taboos words was conducted.

To do this, the researcher manually counted the number of times each of the taboo words used by the respective characters to see which tabooed subjects included the largest number of taboo words used in the movies.

An example of the frequency count table is shown in Figure 3.7

Taboo Category	Number of taboo Words
Sex	0
Bodily functions	3
Death	6
Animals	2
Sanctity	3
Morality	8
Unpleasant concepts	5

Figure 3.7: The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Tabooed Subject

Classification of Taboo Words Based on Effective Factors:

To determine the factors that influenced the formation of these taboo words/expressions in lower and middle class families shown in the two Iranian movies, the researcher classified the taboo words into two major groups of macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4). As Malinowski (1923) states, the context and the situation in which utterances occur are indispensable for understanding the words. Hence, taboo words and taboo expressions should be studied within the context that affects them such as cultural, situational, social and linguistic context. The researcher therefore studied the factors which influenced the taboo words uttered by the movie characters by using Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) suggested framework.

For the macrocontextual (societal) taboo words category, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) stated six effective factors in the formation of taboo words in a society including:

1. Social structure that refers to interaction and relationships between large social groups at any level.
2. Cultural heritage that is the ways a community's living has improved and passed on from generation to generation. This cultural heritage could be anything

ranging from customs, practices, objects, artistic expressions and values, traditions, beliefs and lifestyles (Feather, 2006).

3. Religious beliefs that are a set of beliefs people follow. Religious beliefs are basically linked to supernatural powers like God, angels, and devils. There are some words that are too sacred to be pronounced or written and violation of such taboo words would result in serious consequences (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).
4. Value assumptions are what a community considers good and virtue. In each society, there is a set of values which are respected and praised by the public. The more a society member owns these values, the more respectfully he/she is treated by the community.
5. Behavioral rules refer to the “actions or reactions of persons or things in response to internal and external stimuli” (Microsoft Bookshelf, 1995). Each society has a set of ethical codes and rules which make the community follow them. Breaking any of these behavioral rules is considered going against the community’s norms and standard.
6. Political institutions that refers to any organization which creates, enforces and applies laws and makes policy on social system and economy. In other words, political institutions may also refer to recognized rules and principles within which the above organizations operate (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). Hierarchical power is an effective element which helps to form taboos in a society (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990).

The sample of macrocontextual taboo words classification is presented in Figure 3.8.

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	English
Social Structure	Shaashide too khodesh.	He has pissed in his pants.
Cultural Heritage	Goore babaye talaagh.	Hell with the divorce.
Religious Beliefs	Toole sag!	Dog's offspring!
Value Assumptions	Bi sharaf!	Knavish/ Roguish!
Behavioral Rules	Gom sho.	Get lost.
Political Institutions	None	None

Figure 3.8: Taboo Words Classification Based on Macrocontextual (Societal) Factors

There were five factors offered by Hongxu and Guisen (1990) as the influential factors in microcontextual (situational) taboo words formation. The factors are presented:

1. Participants including speaker and listener and their sex, age, social status and relationship to each other (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1).
2. Purpose of conversation and participants attitudes

A speaker may use verbal taboo to create attention, to discredit a person, to provoke violence confrontation, to create a strong interpersonal identification or to provide catharsis which means the speaker releases his/her intense frustration by using taboo words (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1).

3. Content or subject matter

Some non-taboo words may be considered as a taboo word in a particular time or place. For instance, the word baby is not a taboo; however, talking about babies in front of a friend who has just had a miscarriage is considered taboo as it might cause hurt (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3)

4. Setting including place and time

“Location and time can be effective factors in the formation of taboo words, too,” Hongxu & Guisen (1990) suggest. For example, people may avoid talking about sexual activities or subjects related to that in public or in daily communications with family members, friends or other people whereas they

would be able to talk openly about the issues related to sex and intercourse to a doctor in his/her office.

5. Medium

Medium is the means applied to transmit information between a speaker and an audience or an addresser and addressee. There are two forms of media; the spoken medium and written medium which can convert a word to a taboo in the speaker's or writer's point of view (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Figure 3.9 illustrates the sample table for microcontextual taboo words classification.

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	Translation
Participants	None	None
Purpose of conversation & attitudes of participants	Tike tikashun mikonam.	I will slaughter/ murder them.
Content or Subject Matter	Mifrestameshun zire khaak.	I will murder them.
Setting	None	None
Medium	None	None

Figure 3.9: Taboo Words Classification Based on Microcontextual (Situational) Factors

Taboo Words Comparison Based on the Effective Factors

Through the overall comparison of the number of macrocontextual and microcontextual taboo words/expressions used in the two movies, the researcher would be able to show whether the tabooeness of words in Iranian lower-class and middle-class families was mostly influenced by societal or situational factors. The researcher could then find out whether there were any changes in these factors within the 42-year gap and this could

enlighten the readers as to whether a factor has lost its power or has gained power in influencing the tabooeness of a word.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodology used in approaching this study. It has also discussed the criteria used to select the two movies, how data would be selected, transcribed, translated and presented for analysis. This chapter also mentioned how data would be analysed using Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) framework and the justifications for using it were also explained. The categorisation of the taboo words/expressions as uttered by the characters in two different Iranian movies made in two different eras in terms of the factors influencing the formation of such taboo words in two Iranian social structures, lower-class and middle-class families before and after the revolution were also expounded.

The following chapter will present and discuss the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter covers six sections which will describe firstly, the classification of taboo words/expressions as they were used by the movie characters. These will be presented one after another. The taboo words will then be described in terms of tabooed subjects in each movie respectively. A section focusing on the frequency count of the taboo words/expressions used then follows. This chapter will also classify the taboo words into two contexts: macro and micro contexts according to the framework proposed by Hongxu and Guisen (1990). Explanations given are based on the effective societal and situational factors (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). In this particular section, the formation of these taboo words is also discussed based on the data that were drawn from the two movies. The overall comparison of the macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) taboo words used in each movie will enable the researcher to conclude which factors, whether societal or situational, have more influence in the formation of taboo words before and after the revolution as used by the two social classes depicted in the movies. Eventually, there will be a discussion on the findings.

4.1 Taboo Words Classification Based on the Utterances

After watching the movies, listening to and transcribing the dialogues, the researcher organized the taboo words based on each character's utterances into two different tables, the movie "Qeisar" made before the revolution in 1969 and the movie "Separation" made after the revolution in 2011. The reason for categorizing the taboo words in this way was to consider the social class, age, sex and social status of the characters so as to be able to describe the factors which could have influenced the formation of taboo words since two social structures are involved.

The identification of the taboo words articulated by the movie characters (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3) were based on: a) the researcher's personal knowledge as an Iranian who has lived through those two periods of time (pre revolution and post revolution) and b) based on the input contributed by ten (10) Iranian participants who were surveyed for their perception regarding taboo words used by the movie characters of the two movies (see Appendix A and B which show the sample of the research questionnaire and the results of the survey done about the taboo words in the two Iranian movies).

A list of the characters and their roles in the movie (Qeisar) are established below in Table 4.1 for easier understanding when making explanations.

Table 4.1: The List of Movie Characters in “Qeisar”

Name of character	Gender	Role in movie	Social class
1. Naneh	Female	Fati's mother	Lower class
2. Farman	Male	Fati's elder brother	Lower class
3. Mansour	Male	The rapist	Middle class
4. Karim	Male	Mansour's brother	Middle class
5. Qeisar	Male	Fati's younger brother	Lower class
6. Abbas	Male	Qeisar's Friend	Lower class
7. Soheila	Female	The singer	Lower class
8. The prostitute	Female	The prostitute	Lower class

Note that the movie provides more characters from the lower class families. It seems obvious that this was deliberate as the movie producer, Masoud Kimiaie, was clearly trying to draw attention to the imbalance of the two classes in Iran in the pre revolution era.

The following table, Table 4.2 contains a list of taboo words which were expressed by the movie characters in “Qeisar”.

Table 4.2: Taboo Words Used by the Characters in “Qeisar”

The Movie “Qeisar”			
Characters	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Naneh	Che khaaki be saram shod! Che khaaki be saram konam? Khaak bar saram!	What earth/soil has been put on my head! What earth/soil should I put on my head! Earth/soil on my head!	How can I help it! What on earth can I do? Alas for me!
Farman	Bi marefataa! Naa looti! (2) Khooneshoono mirizam. Tike tikashun mikonam. Naa mard! Bi qeirar! Az ye sag kamtari. Eyne sag zad ziresh. Naa kes! (2) Bi hame chiz!	Without knowledge/without insight! Not a looti/ forgiving! I will shed their blood. I will chop them into pieces. Not a man! Without zeal! You are less than a dog. He denied like a dog. Not a person! Without anything!	Unscrupulous! Rogue/ scoundrel! I will kill them. I will slaughter/murder them. Coward/ Cowardly! Spiritless/ Cowardly/ Zealless! You are as invaluable as a dog. He denied what he had done. Ignoble! Unscrupulous/Unprincipled!
Mansour	Charto part mige.	He says rubbish.	He talks nonsense/ rubbish.
Karim	Har kaso naa kesi.	Everybody and anybody	Any ignoble!
Qeisar	Mifrestameshoon oon donya. Naa mard! (2) Bi marefat! Az khoda bi khabar! Ferestaadam zire khaak. Mifrestameshun zire khaak. Hich kaso naakes! Kesaafat! Ajab aadame khengi hasti. Bezan be chaak.	I will send them to the other world. Not a man! Without knowledge/without insight! Not aware of God’s existence. I sent him under the ground/soil. I will send them under the ground/soil. Not everybody and anybody! Dirt/ filthy! You have a low IQ. Hit the cleft/slit.	I will kill them. Coward/ Cowardly! Unscrupulous! Atheist! I murdered them. I will murder them. Any ignoble! Dirt/ filthy! What a stupid person you are! Go away.
Abbas	Naa marda!	Not a man!	Coward/ Cowardly!
Soheila	Saab Morde! Naa kes! Naa looti! Naa mard! Benal.	Dead owner! Not a person! Not a looti/ forgiving Not a man! Groan/ Moan.	Misfortunate/ Pitiful/ Miserable! Rogue/ scoundrel Coward/ Cowardly! Say what you want.
The prostitute	Akele!	Ugly woman!	Very ugly and bad-looking woman!

Table 4.2 shows that there were only three female characters out of the eight characters identified who used taboo words. This is probably a lop-sided image of gender but nevertheless, the table shows that male characters of the movie used more taboo words than the female characters (Ramazani, 1993). This could be the result of gender discrimination in Iran as the public reaction to a taboo word is mostly related to gender. For instance, a man can apply a sex organ's name in public which is an intense taboo word and it is ignored by the public while if it is used by a woman, the public reaction would be severe towards that woman (Teymori, 2012). The second reason why this is inevitable is because the main characters of the first movie "Qeisar" were mostly men. Lakoff (1975) had suggested that women have a less tendency to apply taboo language as compared to men and women, subjecting themselves to be what the society expects them to be, prefer to use refined and polished language instead. However, Klerk's (1992) study does not support this. In her study, Klerk (ibid) found that the young girls in her study were striving to use the peer language that both males and females would use and they were not subjecting themselves to 'standard prestigious speech' as claimed (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

From the data shown in Table 4.2, it appears that taboo words may be gender specific although as has been mentioned earlier (see Section 4.1) this bias could have developed because of the nature or plot of the movie in "Qeisar". There were five male characters who uttered taboo words as compared to three female characters. The number of taboo words which were used by the male characters was found to be far more than the female characters in the movie "Qeisar". Teymori (2012) has mentioned that there are masculine and feminine taboo words in Iranian society and this means that some taboo words are more used by men than by women. Indirectly, this means that those words would not be appropriate if used by women.

As the table also demonstrates, the number of movie characters considered as lower class in “Qeisar” are six (6) while the number of people considered as middle class in the same movie is only two (2). If this is the case, it would also seem inevitable that more of the taboo words were uttered by those of the lower class than by those in the middle class. Evidence for this can be drawn from the data illustrated in Table 4.2.

For the benefit of making a comparison, the researcher also classified the taboo words/expressions used by movie characters in the second movie, “Separation”. Table 4.3 presents the movie characters, the roles they play in the movie and the social class they come from. This is to illustrate the background of the movie characters.

Table 4.3: The List of Movie Characters in “Separation”

Name of character	Gender	Role in movie	Social class
1. Nader	Male	The husband	Middle class
2. Simin	Female	The wife	Middle class
3. Somyeh	Female	The cleaner’s daughter	Lower class
4. Hojat	Male	The cleaner’s husband	Lower class
5. Azam	Female	The cleaner’s sister-in-law	Lower class

As the table illustrates, the characters were from the lower and middle class. To further illustrate the use of taboo words among the lower class and middle class people depicted in the movie, table 4.4 is presented.

Table 4.4: Taboo Words Used by the Characters in “Separation”

The Movie “Separation”			
Characters	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Nader	Bar pedaret! Bi sharaf! Bi khod kardi! Kodoom goori boodi? Mozakhraf mige. Qalat mikone. Kodoom Goori? Chera mozakhraf migi?	Upon your father! Without honor or dignity! You did it without self! Which grave have you been in? He says of little value/ Insignificant! He makes a mistake. Which grave? Why are you talking rubbish?	Damn your father! Knavish/ Roguish! Fuck off! Where the hell have you been? He talks nonsense/ rubbish! He/ She should repent. Where the hell? Why are you talking nonsense?
Simin	Goore babaye talaagh! Goore pedare kharej! Mesle aadam harf bezan. Qalat kardi! Mozakhraf mige.	Divorce’s father’s grave! Abroad father’s grave! Talk like a human. You made a mistake. He says of little value/ Insignificant!	Hell with the divorce! Hell with the abroad! Say clearly what you mean. You should repent for the silly act. He talks nonsense/ rubbish!
Somayeh	Shaashide too khodesh.	Hi has pissed in himself.	He has pissed in his pants.
Hojat	Kesaafat! Toule sag! Gom sho! Bi sharaf! (2) Goh mikhori! Goore pedare man! Mesle sag endakhtanm biroon. To mardi? Bi sharafm?	Dirt/ filthy! Puppy! Get lost! Without honor/ dignity! You eat shit. My father’s grave! They threw me away like a dog. Are you a man? Don’t I have any honor/ dignity?	Dirt/ filthy! A dog’s offspring! Get lost/ go away! Knavish/ Roguish! You dare to do it. Hell with my father! They fired me. Are you a man? Am I knavish/ roguish?
Azam	Maraz daashtin? Qalat kardam. (2)	Did you have an illness? I made a mistake.	Why on earth you did it? I repent for my silly act.

As the data presented in Table 4.4 shows, out of the five movie characters identified, only two (2) are males and the other three (3) are female. It should be noted here that like the movie “Qeisar” (see Section 4.2), the male characters uttered more taboo words/expressions as compared to the female characters in the movie. In this movie, “Separation” it was thus inevitable that more taboo words were found to be used by the male characters. It appears that the Iranian male characters were more inclined towards using stronger expletives (also considered as taboo) than women. This finding has been supported before (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Based on the comparison of data between the two movies, it was found that there is a distinct difference between the lower class and middle class families' utterances as used by the movie characters in the two movies pre and post revolution. As Table 4.4 illustrates, Nader and Simin, who were the members of the middle class family, were educated, had a good economic and social status seemed to be using almost the equal number of taboo words as compared to Hojat, the cleaner's husband, Azam, the cleaner's sister-in-law and the cleaner's daughter, Somayeh who belonged to the lower class families. This finding appears to contradict Holmes' (1992) report (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Nonetheless, despite the middle class being more educated than the lower class, they were using an equal number of taboo words. In order to understand the reason behind this phenomenon, the researcher probed a little deeper by looking into Iranian society before and after the revolution. It was discovered that before the revolution, there was a huge gap between the middle class and lower class families (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). During that period of time, members of the middle class families were mostly wealthy. They had the opportunity to acquire higher education whether in Iran or abroad. They also tended to have a prominent social, educational and professional status unlike the lower class families who were deprived of these opportunities due to their economic status (Azqandi, 2000). Hence, it was no coincidence that the lower class were those who were at the lower rung of the economy in the country, serving as manual laborers, indirectly, they were also perceived to be rude, crude, uncouth and rough (Lehsaeizadeh, 2004).

4.1.1 The Comparison of Taboo Words Used in the Two Movies

As table 4.2 illustrates, people from the lower class families used more taboo words as compared to the middle class families. There were two possible reasons to have caused this. First, the movie "Qeisar" had focused on the life of lower class families (see

Section 4.2). Second, the number of characters in the lower class was more than those in the middle class. Third, as the less educated group had to deal with more social and family issues, inadvertently, the lower class people also had more reason to curse, use swear words or profanities to let out their frustrations (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Consequently, the lower class people seemed to be using more taboo language. This seems to indicate that the lower the family strata is, in Iranian society, the more they were likely to use taboo language. In addition, the more they were from the lower class, the more issues they had to contend with. The lower class people also had less money; less education hence they could not garner as much support as they wanted.

As shown in the data of the second movie, it appears that both social classes articulated taboo words at an almost equal frequency unlike the movie “Qeisar” in which the lower class members depicted used more taboo words as compared to the middle class. Both classes were also struggling with social and family issues which in turn made them to use taboo words to show their frustration, anger and dissatisfaction of the status they were stuck in (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

The section below discusses the classification of the taboo words based on tabooed subjects.

4.2 Taboo Words Classification Based on Tabooed Subjects

According to Hongxu and Guisen (1990), there are certain subjects in each society which are considered taboo to be discussed or talked about as they are related to religion, culture or social beliefs and norms of that society. Hongxu and Guisen (ibid) also believed that certain non-taboo words can become converted to be taboo in a particular context or situation. Thus, after categorizing the taboo words based on each

movie character's utterances, the researcher then classified the taboo words/expressions according to the tabooed subjects based on the framework adopted from Hongxu and Guisen (1990) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). The aim was to see what subjects were mainly considered taboo in the two Iranian social classes; one before the revolution and one after the revolution. In this section, the tabooed categories (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4) are presented as follows:

1. Sex
2. Bodily functions
3. Death
4. Animals
5. Sanctity
6. Morality
7. Unpleasant concepts

The section below presents the classification of the taboo words used in the movie "Qeisar" based on the seven tabooed subjects introduced.

4.2.1 The Movie "Qeisar" – Tabooed Subjects

The researcher categorized the tabooed subjects in the Iranian lower class and middle class families into seven categories (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4) to find out what tabooed subjects contained the larger number of taboo words in the movie made before the revolution.

The result of this classification is depicted in table 4.5.

Table 4.5: The Classification of Taboo Words Based on Subjects in “Qeisar”

The Movie “Qeisar”			
Subjects	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Standard Translation
Sex	None	None	None
Bodily functions	None	None	None
Death	Che khaaki be saram shod! Che khaaki be saram konam? Khaak bar saram! Khooneshuno mirizam. Tike tikashun mikonam. Ferestaadameshun zire khaak Mifrestameshun zire khaak. Saab morde! Mifrestameshun oon donya.	What earth/soil has been put on my head! What earth/soil should I put on my head! Earth/soil on my head! I will shed their blood. I will chop them into pieces. I sent him under the ground/soil. I will send them under the ground/soil Dead owner! I will send them to the other world.	How can I help it? What on earth can I do? Alas for me! I will kill them. I will slaughter/ murder them. I murdered them. I will murder them. Misfortunate/ Pitiful/ Miserable I will kill them.
Animals	Az ye sag kamtari. Eyne sag zad siresh	You are less than a dog. He denied like a dog.	You are as invaluable as a dog. He denied what he had done.
Sanctity	Az khodaa bi khabar!	Unaware of God existence!	Atheist!
Morality	Bi marefat! Naa looti! (3) Naa mard!(5) Bi qeirat! Naa kes!(3) Bi hame chiz!	Without knowledge/without insight! Not a looti/ forgiving! Not a man! Without zeal! Not a person! Without anything!	Unscrupulous! Rogue/ scoundrel Coward/Cowardly! Spiritless/ Cowardly/ Zealless! Ignoble! Unscrupulous/ Unprincipled!
Unpleasant concepts	Charto part mige! Ajab aadame khengi hasti! Bezan be chaak. Benal. Aakele! Kesaaafat!	He says nonsense. You have a low IQ. Hit the cleft/ slit. Groan/ Moan. Ugly woman! Dirt/filthy!	He talks nonsense/ rubbish. What a stupid person you are! Go away. Say what you want. Very ugly and bad-looking woman! Dirt/ Impure!

As the above table illustrates, the data could only be classified under five categories instead of seven as there were no taboo words associated with sex and bodily functions in “Qeisar”. The taboo words/expressions used by the characters were categorized into different tabooed subjects but to be more specific, the researcher needed to clarify here that the participants’ purpose of using these taboo words in most scenes was to discredit a person or provoke violent confrontation or to insult the addressee (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Taboo words related to ‘sex’ and ‘bodily functions’

There was no taboo word applied in the movie “Qeisar” which was associated with sex or bodily functions. This could be the result of strong religious beliefs of Iranians before the revolution (Satrapi, 2003). According to the religious beliefs of Iranians, talking about anything related to sex organs or sexual relationships is considered ‘haram’ (religiously forbidden). In addition, bodily functions such as urinating or defecating are considered unclean and impure too (Teymori, 2012). It can be concluded that due to these beliefs, no sex or bodily functions-related taboo words were uttered by the movie characters in “Qeisar”. However, it must be mentioned that in the movies made before the revolution including “Qeisar”, sex scenes are shown to the audience. For example, in “Qeisar”, the scene where Fati is raped by Mansour is shown but the words related to this scene which are described by the characters are replaced by euphemisms. A good example of this phenomenon is when Fati’s uncle applies the expression of ‘someone took Fati’s dignity away’ instead of saying ‘someone had raped Fati’.

Taboo words related to ‘death’

In looking at the taboo words related to the ‘death’ category, which also constituted the second larger group of taboo words used according to the tabooed subject, it was found that these words could be rooted in Iranian culture and beliefs about death and its related-issues. In Iranian culture, separation from one’s beloved dependents due to death is considered a very painful and oppressive experience (Edalati, 2012). This spells a major disaster and so it becomes a misfortune that might happen to someone. In addition, Iranians avoid talking about topics related to death in their daily conversation because it is not a pleasant topic to discuss. Should they need to discuss a topic on ‘death, Iranians would apply euphemism (Bakhtiar, 2012). The reason for using euphemisms while talking about death, funerals and dead people is believed to protect

the speakers and those related to them from death. Iranians seem to think that talking about death and its related-subjects directly might make them suffer from the same incident in the near future. Apparently, such a taboo custom also applied to the Chinese as explained by Hongxu and Guisen (1990). Thus, it appears that Iranian superstitions could be a reason for this behavior as stated by Edalati (2012). It is argued that the taboo words related to death were therefore used by the characters in “Qeisar” to show how unfortunate and pathetic the characters were. For instance, in the scene where Fati’s mother found out about her daughter’s death, she used the expression ‘khak bar saram shod’ (earth on my head). The expression ‘khak bar sar shodan’ (having earth on one’s head) was taken from the word ‘khak rikhtan’ (bury) a dead body. These expressions are used as curse upon oneself and are not considered pleasant. At this moment, Fati’s mother intended to show how unfortunate and devastated she was because of her own child’s loss. She expressed that this painful experience was beyond her patience. Hence, it appears that she used the taboo word as a curse upon herself.

As table 4.5 has also illustrated, the other expressions used in the ‘death’ category was uttered by Qeisar and Farman, Fati’s brothers, once they discovered the fact that their sister committed suicide because she had been raped and impregnated by Mansour Abmangol. Farman and Qeisar used the expressions ‘khooneshouno mirizam’ (I will shed their blood), ‘mifrestameshun oon donya’ (I will send them to the other world), ‘misfrestameshun zire khak’ (I will send them under the ground) and ‘tike tikashoun mikonam’ (I will chop them into pieces) to express their anger and their intention of taking revenge on Mansour and his brothers. In Farsi language, applying such expressions which are related to murder on the addressee can be one way of showing one’s anger, frustration and threatening intention (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Because these expressions were not used in normal situations, and because they were linked to

death, they were thus considered taboo. It must also be mentioned here that these expressions are not taboo in Farsi language if they are used in normal situations but in particular contexts, these non-taboo words are seen as taboo words (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

In addition, another taboo expression, ‘Sab morde’ (dead owner) was also considered taboo because it was linked to death in the movie. The singer represents the lower class families before the revolution. The lower class families were not able to find high status jobs and they were involved in jobs like begging, street cleaning, gambling and prostitution before the revolution (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). Singing in that era was considered a low rank job particularly for women as they had to sing in bars and restaurants, places frequented by men. No ‘decent women’ of that era would be expected to ‘sell their face’. Based on the researcher’s experience of Iranian society before the revolution and what was viewed as the pre revolutionary cinema depictions, women who were employed as singers in bars were inevitably those from lower class families who were desperately trying to make a livelihood. Thus, they had to do whatever they were asked to, ranging from wearing revealing clothes to attract customers to having sexual relationship with the customers or the bar owners. That was why during the pre-revolution era, the other members of the society looked down upon female singers and did not respect them (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). In the scene in “Qeisar” where the singer used ‘sab morde’ (dead owner) she was addressing herself as an unfortunate woman who had to work and sing in a bar. The real meaning of this word can be construed as being left to fend for self, like an object whose owner is dead.

Taboo words related to ‘animals’

The expression ‘mesle ye sag zad ziresh’ (He denied like a dog) and ‘as ye sag kamtari’ (you are less than a dog) were used by Farman when he was fighting with Mansour Abmangol, the rapist. In this movie, Farman addressed Mansour, the rapist as a dog. According to Iranian religious belief (Islam), a dog is considered as an unclean, filthy and unsacred animal. Muslims are forbidden from keeping or touching a dog. It is also said that the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Mohammed said: “whoever owns a dog, with the exception of a dog to guard livestock, hunt or a farm dog, one qirat (a unit of measurement) of his good deeds and rewards will be deducted every day (El Fadl, 2006). In the Islamic ideology, and based on the researcher’s personal experience as an Iranian Muslim, Muslims are also prohibited from entering a house where a dog is kept as a pet. If these Muslims have to be there, they must not touch, eat or drink anything in that particular house. Some Muslims believe that Angels would not enter the house where a dog is kept (Abdullah, 1989). As a result, the word ‘dog’ is thus used as a swearword in Farsi language. In the movie “Qeisar”, Mansour was termed a dog by Farman, Fati’s brother, in order to show Mansour’s inner filth and dirtiness as well as his dirty act, behavior and mind.

Taboo words related to ‘sanctity’

The only taboo expression found to have been used and which was related to ‘religion’ was the expression, ‘az khoda bi khabar’ (unaware of God existence) and it was used by Qeisar when he was talking about the rapist. In this scene, Qeisar did not know who the rapist was. He was then addressing the rapist as an atheist who had committed the crime. The lower class families, before the revolution, were very traditional and religious (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). For them, the concept of ‘*halal*’ (religiously allowed) and ‘*haram*’ (religiously forbidden) dominated all aspects of their life. The

religious Iranians also believed that if a person believes in God, he/she distinguishes ‘halal’ actions from ‘haram’ actions well. Therefore, he/she avoids committing crimes out of fear of God and the punishment thereafter. As is shown in the movie, Qeisar had also believed that the rapist was an atheist; otherwise, he would not act like that out fear of God and his punishments after death.

Taboo words related to ‘morality’

A very common word heard before the revolution was ‘looti’ (to be forgiving and generous) or ‘lootigary’ (to be of a forgiving and generous attitude) and this was based on the definition provided by the Haim (1928-31) and Dehkhoda dictionary (1931). This term, ‘looti’ was used to address a group or sect of male members of the lower class who were well-known for their generosity, manliness and support to the poor people (Satrapi, 2003). By briefly making a reference to pre-revolutionary movies like “Salare Mardan” (The Master of Men), 1968, “Hossein Kord” (Kurdish Hossein) 1966, “Ganje Gharoon” (Croesus Treasure), 1965, it can be noticed that the term ‘looti’ is normally used to refer to particular men who wear a black suit with a white shirt but the white shirt is unbuttoned down to the bellybutton. In addition, a handkerchief is either hanging around the neck of the wearer or it is being held in the hands. Further, a ‘looti’ also consists of a black brim hat and black shoes. A search on similar movies indicated that many of these movies, prior to the revolution (see Chapter 2, Section 1.4), were dedicated to the ‘looties’s lifestyle and how they contributed in solving the problems of others. Hence, being a ‘looti’ was considered a social value in the lower class during that era. Consequently, calling someone ‘na looti’ (not a looti) was considered as taboo as it would mean that the addressee lacked manliness, generosity and was unforgiving. In other words, during that era, no Iranian from the lower members of the society would

refer to another member as ‘na looti’ unless he chose to be extremely rude and insulting to the addressee.

In looking at the taboo words used by the movie characters as shown in Table 4.5, it also appears that most of the taboo words used by the movie characters representing the lower class families tended to demonstrate the speakers’ anger, dissatisfaction and unhappiness at the situation they were stuck in. In addition, taboo words were used in their conflicts with the middle class families or to show oppression and the lack of respect by the middle class towards the lower class (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). As was shown in the movie “Qeisar”, Mansour Abmangol, the rapist, was from a middle class family. Despite being the culprit who had behaved indecently towards Fati, the girl from a lower class family, Mansour, chose to ignore the act and so continuously denied that he had caused Fati’s death by raping and impregnating her. It appears that this is where the tyranny of the middle class and its oppression pulled at the heart strings of the lower class people. In their exchange of words, the movie characters of the lower class families used the taboo words related to manliness and humanity as a way of expressing their dissatisfaction and frustration. Words like ‘naa mard’ (not a man), ‘naa kes’ (ignoble), ‘bi hame chiz’ (unscrupulous), ‘bi qeirat’ (spiritless) and ‘bi marefat’ (unscrupulous) were articulated as a way of showing how furious they were with Mansour’s act (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Taboo words related to ‘unpleasant concepts’

The ‘unpleasant concepts’ category as presented in Table 4.5 includes any word or expression that seemed offending or hurting to the addressee’s feelings, personality and social status (see Chapter 1, Section 1.9). For instance, the use of ‘benal’ (moan) instead of ‘begoo’ (say) that is used on a person is considered rude as it has a negative

connotation. 'Naalidan' in Farsi language means to groan and mourn which is mostly done during a disaster like the death of beloved ones. When an addresser applies this word upon an addressee, like in the scene where the singer in "Qeisar" used it the term indicates a rude way of asking someone to start talking about him/her self.

The word 'kesaafat' (dirt/filthy) as is categorized in the 'unpleasant concepts' category is derived from the word 'kasif' (dirty/unclean). The word 'kasif' (dirty/unclean) does not bear any "tabooness" in Farsi language unless it is used to refer to someone's personality or behavior. For example, one can say that his hands are 'kasif' (dirty) and it is not taboo. However, it becomes taboo if someone calls another 'kessafat' (dirt/filthy). In this case, it is insulting and it shows the anger and dissatisfaction of the speaker towards the addressee. This word was used by Qeisar in the scene where he was chasing Mansour Abmangol, the rapist. Qeisar was expressing what a filthy spirit and dirty conscience Mansour had to have treated Fati the way he did and that this eventually caused Fati's death.

As it is presented in Table 4.5, talking nonsense or rubbish (charto part mige) is also considered taboo in Farsi language when the speaker uses it to address another person. This was what Mansour, the rapist, said when he heard Farman accusing him of raping Fati, Farman's sister. Mansour tried to deny the fact and he replied that Farman was talking nonsense and that Farman was out of his mind. In this scene, it was observed that the social class which Mansour belonged to, the middle class family served as the gate way for him (Mansour) to behave unethically and to treat a member of the lower class with disrespect. Mansour, indeed tried to hide the fact that he had raped and impregnated Fati. Ultimately, being a member of the middle class also served as a

license for him (Mansour) to behave unethically or to commit crimes without being punished.

In one of the scenes, Qeisar used the taboo expression ‘bezan be chak’ (go away) on a person who was watching him fighting. This expression was a very common term used during the pre-revolution era especially by the lower class people of Iranian society. It was an expression people used to threaten the addressee so as not to get involved in any fight or conflict. As the movie depicted, Qeisar needed to gain attention (Mc Edwards, 1969) and in order to create a strong interpersonal identification (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3) as a way of making his stand, Qeisar used a taboo word linked to threat as a way of showing to society what kind of person he was.

To say that someone is stupid (ajab adame kheingi hasti) is equal to using a taboo expression in Farsi language, especially if it is used in a serious context like it was used in the movie ‘Qeisar’. In one of the scenes, Qeisar addressed the singer as a stupid person. This taboo expression was used by Qeisar to discredit and humiliate the singer.

The word ‘akele’ which means a very ugly and bad-looking woman (Dehkhoda, 1931) is indeed a taboo word in Farsi language. As one’s beauty is an important social indicator for women in Iranian society (Satrapi, 2003), it appears that calling another woman ‘akele’ (very ugly) is considered taboo. In the movie “Qeisar”, the prostitute, a lower class member, mentioned that after a few years of working in the sex services, she would eventually look like an ‘akele’, a very ugly woman with an unpleasant look. In this context, a taboo word was articulated as a way of demeaning oneself.

Having discussed the taboo words used by the characters in “Qeisar”, the following section discusses taboo words used in “Separation”.

4.2.2 The Movie “Separation” – Tabooed Subjects

Taboo words identified from the movie “Separation” were categorized into seven tabooed subjects and this was according to the framework adopted from Hongxu and Guisen (1990) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

Table 4.6 illustrates the data extracted and a section discussing these will follow.

Table 4.6: The Classification of Taboo Words Based on Subjects in “Separation”

The Movie “Separation”			
Subjects	Words Extracted	Literal Translation	Translation
Sex	None	None	None
Bodily functions	Shaashide too khodesh. Goh mikhori!	He has pissed in himself. You eat shit.	He has pissed in his pants. You dare to do it.
Death	Goore babaye talaq! Goore pedare kharej! Goore pedare man! Kodoom Goori? Kodoom goori boodi?	Divorce’s father’s grave! Abroad’s father’s grave! My father’s grave! Which grave? Which grave have you been in?	Hell with the divorce! Hell with the abroad! Hell with my father! Where the hell? Where the hell have you been?
Animals	Toule sag! Mesle sag endakhtanam biroon.	Puppy! They threw me away like a dog.	A dog’s offspring! They fired me.
Sanctity	Bar pedaret!	Upon your father!	God damn your father!
Morality	Bi sharaf! (3) To mardi? Bi sharafam?	Without honor or dignity! Are you a man? Don’t I have any honor/dignity?	Knaveish/ Roguish! Are you a real man? Am I knaveish/ roguish?
Unpleasant concepts	Maraz daashtin? Qalat kardam. (2) Gomsho! Kesaafat! Mesle aadam harf bezan. Qalat kardi! Qalat mikone. Bi khod kardi! Chera mozakhrif migi? Mozakhrif mige! (2)	Did you have an illness? I made a mistake. Go away! Dirt/ filthy! Talk like a human. You made a mistake. He makes a mistake. You did it without self! Why are you talking rubbish! He says rubbish!	Why on earth you did it? I repent for my silly act. Get lost! Dirt/ Impure! Say clearly what you mean. You dare to do it. He should repent. You should repent for your silly act. Why are you saying nonsense! He says nonsense/rubbish!

Table 4.6 shows that the only tabooed subject which was not used by the movie characters in the movie “Separation” was from the ‘sex’ category in comparison to the movie “Qeisar” (see Section 4.2.1). Another difference was the difference between the number of taboo words used in the ‘morality’ category in “Separation” as compared to “Qeisar”. In the movie “Qeisar”, the majority of taboo words were associated with ‘morality’ while in “Separation” they were mostly associated with ‘unpleasant concepts’. As it was mentioned about the taboo words articulated in “Qeisar”, the taboo words used in “Separation” also indicated the addresser’s frustration, anger, and dissatisfaction and was aimed at provoking the addressees (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Taboo words related to ‘sex’

As it has been discussed earlier in this chapter, sex-related topics are strictly forbidden to be used in Iranian daily conversation. It is to be mentioned that religious restrictions on sexual relationships and topics still exist in Iranian society. However, the distinct difference between movies made before and after the revolution is sex scene. Showing scenes related to sexual behavior appeared normal in the movies produced before the revolution due to the King’s Westernized point of view whereas any scene reflecting affection, love or passion between sexes are strictly prohibited in the movies made after the revolution (Issari, 1999) as the government is religiously founded and the Supreme leader favors Islam.

Taboo words related to ‘bodily functions’

The word ‘shaashidan’ (to piss or urinate) as shown in Table 4.6 is an impolite way of talking about urination in Farsi language according to Haim Dictionary (1929-31). In the movie, “Separation”, Somayeh, the cleaner’s daughter, who was from the lower class family, used this taboo word. As an Iranian, most Iranians in particular, those from

the middle class and higher class families, normally use the word 'toilet' or 'dast shooie' (a place to wash hands) when they want to refer to the action of defecating or urinating (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Using the word 'shaashidan' (piss) seems very inappropriate and rude especially if one needs to consider the addressee's age, social status and gender (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990). However, as the movie depicted, Somayeh who was about 8 years old, used this word when she was talking to her mother, Razieh to explain the elderly man's status.

Another example can be traced to the word, 'Goh' (shit) which is a very common taboo word in Farsi language as it is related to bodily functions. This word is considered taboo and when used, is often to show the addresser's anger and frustration to the addressee (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). According to the religious beliefs of Iranians, anything related to the bodily functions like urine or defecation is unclean. These kinds of impurity must be washed away from the body. Applying excretory terms in one's conversation is considered taboo in Farsi language. Thus, the expression, 'Goh khordan' (eating shit) which means 'you dare to do it' in English carries taboo which is applied as a way of swearing in a conversation and also for provoking the addressee's reaction.

Taboo words related to 'death'

In several scenes, when the characters were arguing with each other, they used the expression 'kodoum gouri' (which grave? which grave have you been in?). These two taboo expressions are rooted in Iranian religious belief towards death, hereafter, and hell and heaven. 'Goor' in Farsi means grave. A graveyard is considered an unpleasant place and so when mentioned it is perceived as an unpleasant omen in Iranian culture (Edalati, 2012). As has been mentioned above, the word is related to death. Hence, when Iranians

use 'goor' (grave) to refer to a location, they mean an unpleasant place. Once this word is used, it is to express the addresser's anger about someone not being around or that the addresser is wondering where exactly the person is/was. In the movie, Nader used this taboo word when he wanted to find out where Simin, his wife, had been to when he (Nader) got into trouble because of the cleaner, Razieh. In this scene, Nader was trying to release his frustration and to discredit his wife and her behavior (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3) for leaving him and moving to her parents' house.

'Goore babaye talaq' (divorce's father's grave) and 'goore pedare kharej' (abroad father's grave) are the other taboo words associated with death which were used in "Separation". As it has been mentioned above, 'goor' (grave) refers to death in the Farsi language. Once one uses these taboo expressions, he/she tends to curse something or somebody to die which is considered taboo. Thus, in the scene that Simin used these words she tended to express that she did not care about the divorce and going abroad anymore.

Taboo words related to 'animals'

The word 'toole sag' (the dog's offspring) was uttered by Hojat, the cleaner's husband when he was talking about his child that was miscarried. Hojat was trying to illustrate that Nader, the man from the middle class family had looked down upon Hojat's unborn baby as a dog's offspring (see Section 4.2.1). In this scene, it was obvious that the word dog was used to discredit the lower class families when they confronted the middle class members of the society. In the same scene, Hojat mentioned that the children of wealthy people like Nader are humans but the children of poor people (like him) are the dog's offspring. Therefore, by using this word, Hojat pointed out that Nader, a middle-class member of the society had ignored Razieh's unborn child because Nader had

considered the lower-class families and their children as less valuable and less important even though they were from the same society.

Another expression used in one of the scenes was ‘mesle sag endakhtanam biroon’ (they threw me away like a dog). Hojat, the cleaner’s husband was complaining to the judge that how he had been oppressed as a lower class member of the community. He mentioned that his employer fired him after twenty years without considering his financial condition and did not pay anything to him as an appreciation of 20-years of hard work. This is when he said that he was thrown away like a dog (see Section 4.2.1). Hojat, as a traditional, religious member of the society articulated this taboo expression to show that he was treated like a dog, an unclean and unimportant animal that is looked down upon and ignored by middle class members of the society.

Taboo words related to ‘sanctity’

According to Iranian culture, fathers are the most respected members of family as they are the breadwinners and are responsible for the whole family (see Chapter 2, Sections 1.2 and 1.3). In this regard, any time a swear word is used to insult one’s father, the act and the use for the word is considered as taboo. Hence, to offend and curse someone as 'bar pedaret' (God damn your father) is an act of insulting and cursing one's father. This is a highly disrespectful action and the taboo word articulated can lead to violent acts. It is believed that this taboo word is rooted in Iranian religious belief of God and his mercy or wrath to humans. Iranians believes that if God disfavours a human and curses him/her because of his/her bad deeds, then that respective individual would suffer from disasters and misfortunes throughout his/her life. In one scene in “Separation”, Nader, the father of the family had shown his anger to his own daughter. He accomplished this

by using this particular taboo word. When he told his daughter 'God damn your father', he indeed was cursing himself.

Taboo words related to 'morality'

In Table 4.6, 'Bi sharfar' was used one (1) time by Nader, from the middle class family and three (3) times by Hojat from the lower class when they were arguing on the complaints they had filed at the Supreme Court. Having 'sharaf' (honor and dignity) is a very distinct personal value among Iranians. There is a saying in Farsi language: 'You'd better have only 'sharaf' (dignity) to live on rather than money or food'. People who have dignity always respect other people's rights, life and opinions. However, the negative form of this word, 'bi sharaf' is a swear word in Farsi. Calling someone 'bi sharaf' means labeling him/her as a knavish or roguish person, someone without honor or dignity. Hojat, the cleaner's husband was accusing Nader of causing his child's death and Nader was accusing Hojat of being a fraud who wanted to take advantage of this incident and make money. As it was depicted in the movie, if Hojat could prove that Nader caused his (Hojat) wife's miscarriage, according to the law, Nader had to pay the blood-money for the miscarried child. Since Hojat had a lot of debts and desperately needed money, it appeared that he insisted on Nader's guilt of causing his child death to get the money. Nader defended himself and said that he did not cause Hojat's child death and that Hojat had made up the whole story to make some money out of it. That was when Hojat asked Nader whether he thought he (Hojat) was 'bi sharaf' (without dignity) to accuse Nader falsely of his unborn child's death to make money. Hojat wanted to show that his concern was his child not the money.

In one of the scenes, when Hojat was arguing with Nader, he addressed him and asked him whether he was a man or not as Nader had pushed the cleaner, Hojat's wife

resulting in her child miscarriage. A man would never hurt a woman physically or emotionally as women are considered the weak and defenseless members of the society. Addressing someone as not man bears taboo in Farsi language since it shows the speaker's anger towards the listener's inappropriate behavior and act against someone (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3)

Taboo words related to 'unpleasant concepts'

In the movie "Separation", the word 'Kesaafat' (dirt, filthy) was used by Hojat when he was arguing with Nader about Razieh's miscarriage. Razieh's husband intended to show his anger and to provoke a violent confrontation with Nader and so it is obvious that the purpose of applying this taboo word was to enable Razieh's husband voice his feelings about Nader (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

In "Separation" where a scene showed Nader complaining to the judge that whatever Hojat, the cleaner's husband was saying was 'mozakhraf' (nonsense). In Iranian culture, any meaningless or useless thing could be called 'mozakhraf' (Dehkhoda, 1931) and is not considered as taboo, for example, when making reference to a book or a movie being 'mozakhraf' (nonsense). However, once a person, like Nader, from the middle class family uses this word to address another person like Razieh's husband, from the lower class family, the word automatically becomes taboo as it was used to insult the addressee. Clearly, the word was meant to say that the person being addressed was talking rubbish or nonsense, thereby 'stupid' or below intelligence'. As this scene depicts, the Supreme Court judge discriminated in their treatment of the two classes in Iranian society. When Hojat started complaining to the judge, Nader stopped him by telling he was talking nonsense. The judge agreed with Nader and stopped listening to

Hojat. Apparently, Nader was the educated, wealthy middle class person and so his words were more respected and accepted by the judge.

Another example is traced to another scene where Simin tells her husband, Nader, 'mesle aadam harf bezan'. The literal meaning of this expression is 'to talk like a human'. However, this taboo expression, when used, tends to express the speaker's anger for listening to nonsense. In this movie, Simin needed her husband, Nader, to give a logical reasoning and explanation for what he was saying. It seems as if Nader was twisting his words around and making things difficult to comprehend to Simin. As a result, when one seems to be evading from being straightforward and does not actually say what he/she means, then the listener may use this expression to show that he/she is impatient. Thus, the word becomes taboo depending on context.

As Table 4.6 presented, in one of the scenes when Nader was threatening his wife and warning her not to separate their daughter from him by taking her abroad, he was also using a taboo expression 'bi khod kardi' which could mean 'fuck off' in English. This expression is usually used as a swearword to insult someone. It seems that such an expression was used as a way to vent his anger at his wife. Thus a taboo word was used for the purpose of letting out one's anger or frustration (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Another example of this category is evidenced in another common taboo word in Farsi which is the word of 'qalat' (mistake) especially when used in combination with the word 'kardan' (do or make). 'Qalat' by itself does not bear any taboo in Farsi language but when it is used to address people, it becomes an offensive swear word. According to Haim's dictionary (1929-31) and Dekhoda (1931), 'qalat' as a swear word means to repent. This is why if one uses the expression of 'qalat mikoni', (You

should repent for your silly act or remark), he/she is swearing at the addressee. In the movie, “Separation”, characters from both the lower class and the middle class used this taboo expression (qalat karadan) to show how wrong the others’ act was. In contrast, when this taboo expression is used on the first person, ‘I’, it shows that the speaker regrets what he/ she has done and is cursing him/herself. Nonetheless, even if using this word to curse oneself, the word carries some degree of taboo. In the movie, “Separation”, the taboo word was used by Azam, the cleaner’s sister-in-law when she confessed to her brother that she had introduced Razieh as a cleaner to Nader. In this scene, Azam was cursing herself for acting as the middle person. However, once this taboo word is used to address the second or third person in the conversation, it acts as a strong warning to the addressee not to do what she/he intends to. In other words, the taboo word could be used to invoke a prohibition of some kind.

Another example is in the word, ‘gom sho’ which literally means ‘get lost’. It is not a taboo in itself but becomes taboo depending on the context used (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4). For example, when Razieh's husband, Hojat, used the word 'gom sho' (get lost) to Nader, it was considered taboo. In this case, a non-taboo word became a taboo word as the main purpose of the speaker (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Razieh’s husband used this taboo word to express the view that he did not want to see Nader any more.

In another scene, when Razieh's sister-in-law, Azam, used the taboo word 'maraz dashtin' (Did you have an illness?) she was demonstrating the huge mistake Nader and Simin made by going to the hospital. The word 'Maraz' (illness, disease) does not bear taboo in Farsi language. However, the purpose of the conversation and the participants’ attitude can transform a non-taboo word to become taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3 and 2.4). On this occasion, the speaker’s intention of using the word ‘maraz’

(illness or disease) was to show that the addressee is suffering from a serious mental and physical problem and because of that he/she had made such a big mistake. Hence, when someone wishes to express anger and dissatisfaction because of another person's act or attitude, they can use this expression.

The next section shows the frequency count of taboo words in each subject category.

4.3 The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Subjects

To determine the most common taboo words category, the researcher counted the number of taboo words in each movie manually.

4.3.1 The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Subjects in “Qeisar”

The frequency of each taboo word used by the “Qeisar” was manually counted. The results are presented in table 4.7.

Table 4.7: The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Subject in “Qeisar”

Tabooed Subjects	Number
Sex	0
Bodily functions	0
Death	9
Animals	2
Sanctity	1
Morality	14
Unpleasant concepts	6

As the frequency count shows, the taboo words related to moral issues such as loyalty, generosity, humanity, forgiveness and kindness comprised the largest number (14 words). Taboo words related to death and unpleasant concepts categories were used nine

(9) and six (6) times respectively. There were no taboo words used associated with sex and bodily functions. Unlike the morality category which contained 14 taboo words, sanctity-related taboo words were the smallest in number at only one (1). There were two (2) uses of taboo words related to the name of animals- dog.

It is clear from the data that the most common taboo words used prior to the revolution were taboo words related to morality issues, particularly when it concerns the lower class families, as was depicted in the movie, “Qeisar”. The lower class sector in Iran was deprived from education, stable employment and economic status and was also always struggling with family issues such as alcoholism, addiction, and other types of crimes (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). As a result, members of this social group were always seeking for support from other members of the society. This is probably why most of the taboo words used by this group of people, as depicted in the movie, were related to values of being human such as kindness, loyalty, gentleness, and being supportive of those who are inferior.

There were no taboo words used in the category of sex or bodily functions probably because for both the lower and middle class families talking about sexual relationship and topics related to sex and bodily functions were probably considered ‘haram’ (religiously forbidden) based on religious beliefs or social norms of Iranian society (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2).

The following section shows the frequency count in the second movie, “Separation”.

4.3.2 The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Subjects in “Separation”

The researcher manually counted the frequency usage of the taboo words in the movie “Separation” which were classified according to the seven tabooed subjects and the results are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: The Frequency Count of Taboo Words Used Based on Subjects in “Separation”

Tabooed Subjects	Number
Sex	0
Bodily functions	2
Death	5
Animals	2
Sanctity	1
Morality	5
Unpleasant concepts	12

As can be seen, it appears that the largest number of taboo words used in the movie, “Separation” which was made after the revolution, depicting the lower class and middle class families, were related to ‘unpleasant concepts’ including words and expressions which sounded unpleasant to the addressees. In total, there were twelve (12) taboo words followed by five (5) taboo words in the ‘death’ and ‘morality’ categories each. There were two taboo words related to bodily functions and animals which were used by both lower class and middle class members. There was no taboo word linked to sex in the movie “Separation” while only one taboo word related to religion was used by the movie characters in “Separation”.

From this data, it is clear that media censorship in the closed society of Iran (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4) before and after the revolution, in particular cinema industry restriction and censorship, could be the main factor where taboo words related to ‘sex’ were not used. It appears that the movie produced before the revolution contained some

sexual scenes which were considered taboo (Parhami, 1999) but there were no taboo words related to 'sex' used in the movie. Things seemed to change after the revolution where Iran, as a country that is under the Republic Islamic government, faced more severe restrictions. Not only were there no taboo words related to sex uttered in the movies, it seems that there was also no scene depicting the sexual relationship and intimacy between a man and a woman (see Chapter 2, Section 1.4). It appears as if Iran in the post-revolution era, became more 'pious'. No one was allowed to have any eye contact with opposite sex and the free expression of people in love was also curtailed. There was to be no direct eye contact or love expressions between a male and a female and this too was practiced by the movie characters in "Separation" (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Apparently, such actions were considered as 'haram' in a bid to conform to the ideology, 'feqh' of the new government (Vahdat, 2003). According to Mottahedeh (2008), the filmmakers, after the revolution, had to ensure that women were veiled even on screen as this was based on the Islamic Republic's system of modesty. This is one reason why there was no gaze, a cinematic system of looking, in Iranian movie scenes (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4).

Taboo words which were associated with religion were used only once. Religion is the other subject which has been strictly controlled by the government after the revolution (Vahdat, 2003) and the clergy now serve as the heads of the government. The religious atmosphere in Iran after the revolution probably explains why "Separation" contained the least number of taboo words that were related to the religious category.

4.4 Taboo Words Categorization Based on Macrocontextual and Microcontextual Factors

According to Hongxu and Guisen (1990), there are several factors which contribute to taboo formation in a society. They believe that macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) factors play a key role in converting or transforming a non-taboo word to become a taboo word and vice versa (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

In this section, the macrocontextual factors were divided into six categories of social structure (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4):

1. Cultural heritage
2. Religious beliefs
3. Value assumptions
4. Behavioral rules
5. Political institutions

In terms of the microcontextual factors, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) suggested that there are five situational factors which affect the formation of the taboo words in a society (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4) including:

1. Participants
2. Purpose of conversation and attitudes of participants
3. Content or subject matter
4. Setting
5. Medium

To begin this analysis, the data were categorized into two major groups based on the respective factors which could have influenced the formation of those taboo words as used among the lower class and middle class families before and after the revolution.

4.4.1 Macrocontextual and Microcontextual Factors in the Movie “Qeisar”

The researcher classified the taboo words/expressions in “Qeisar” based on the factors which influenced their formation (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). The section below presents the classification of the taboo words.

Taboo words classification in “Qeisar” based on macrocontextual (societal) factors

The taboo words retrieved from the movie “Qeisar” were categorized according to the six effective factors (see Section 4.4) which had led to the formation of those taboo words/expressions as used by the lower and middle class families before the revolution.

The result of such a categorization is depicted in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Taboo Words Classification in “Qeisar” Based on Macrocontextual (Societal) Factors

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	Standard Translation
Social Structure	Naa looti!	Rogue/ Scoundrel!
Cultural Heritage	Che khaaki be saram shod! Che khaaki be saram konam? Khaak bar saram! Saab morde! Akele!	How can I help it? What on earth can I do? Alas for me! Misfortune/ Pitiful/ Miserable! Very ugly and bad-looking woman!
Religious Beliefs	Az ye sag kamtari. Eyne sag zad ziresh. Az khoda bi khabar! Kesaafat!	You are as invaluable as a dog. He denied what he had done. Atheist! Dirt/ filthy!
Value Assumptions	Bi marefataa! Naa mard! Bi qeirat! Naa kes! Bi hame chiz! Har kas o naakes!	Unscrupulous! Coward/ Cowardly! Spiritless/ Cowardly/ Zealless! Ignoble! Unscrupulous/ Unprincipled! Any ignoble!
Behavioral Rules	Ajab adame khengi hasti Bezan be chaak Charto part mige	What a stupid person you are. Get lost. He talks nonsense/ rubbish.
Political Institutions	None	None

According to the classification of taboo words provided in Table 4.9, it can be seen that most of the taboo words before the revolution in Iran, were formed due to culture, religious beliefs, social values and behavioral rules. It appears that none of the movie characters from both social classes applied taboo words which were associated with politics. In this regards, it would seem that Iranian people, prior to the revolution, do not use taboo words linked to political subjects. This is probably because of the political landscape in that particular era (see Chapter 2, Section 1.2).

Formation of taboo words due to ‘social structure’

According to Table 4.9, it can be concluded that the social structure of Iran before the revolution had the least influence in the formation of the taboo words used in movies. As Table 4.9 shows, the only taboo word that could have resulted from the development of the social structure of Iranian society before the revolution was the expression, ‘naa looti’ (rogue or scoundrel) (see Section 4.2). Therefore, it is deduced that this taboo word was formed as a result of the lower class’s viewpoint of humanity, bravery and generosity. It became taboo when it was used to address someone lacking humanity and generosity. However, the usage of the word ‘looti’ as a positive connotation or ‘na looti’ as a negative connotation disappeared after the revolution (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3).

In 1979, after the revolution, the supreme leader of Iran, Khomeini ordered to the time president, Rafsanjani to create a morality bureau to uproot the corruption which existed from the pre-revolutionary era among people (Sepehri, 2000). This bureau was ordered by the supreme leader to command what is just and to forbid what is wrong (amr-e be marouf and nahy-e az monkar) according to Quranic orders. This morality enforcement power arrested and punished thousands of people for moral crimes such as gambling, prostitution, alcoholism, and even singing so as to convert Iran to a “clean” society (Sepehri, 2000). Arresting the ‘looties’ as the street thugs who disturbed other people

and committed many crimes was one of the actions of the morality bureau. It could be concluded that during this era being labeled as a ‘looti’ was not considered a social value like the era before the revolution but resulted in disrespect, disgust and hatred towards these members of the society. In recent years, the Iranian government has legislated against these people and executed many of them. It is clear then that the social structure before the revolution affected the use of the word ‘looti’.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘cultural heritage’

Death and its related issues are taboo among Iranians (see Section 4.2). For this reason, Iranians avoid talking about topics/subjects related to death. The formation of certain taboo words which are related to death could be due to the cultural beliefs of Iranians.

The formation of the taboo word ‘akele’ (very ugly woman), for example, was influenced by the cultural values of Iranians. A woman’s beauty has been always praised in Iranian culture and literature (Teymori, 2012) and has been considered a distinct personal value particularly when a woman has been chosen by a man to be his wife. It appears calling a woman ugly (akele), regardless of whether she is beautiful or not is considered taboo. Using such a word spells insult or disrespect for the woman involved.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘religious beliefs’

In many societies, religion and religious beliefs exist in most aspects of a person’s social and personal life. Hence, people living in certain cultures are cautious in applying words related to religion. In Iran like many other societies, for instance, China (Hongxu & Guisen, 1999), discussing religion-related subjects/topics is considered risky and normally people avoid such topics. Sanctity has always been considered precious therefore to insult and disrespect one’s religious beliefs is definitely taboo. As Table 4.9

depicts, two types of taboo words were formed in the movie “Qeisar” due to the religious beliefs of Iranians. These include animals and dirt/filth which are explained as following:

Animals

It is probably disrespectful to label any person by any animal label such as calling a person an ‘ass’, a ‘pig’, a cow’ or a ‘dog’ although it is undeniable that some societies view certain animals with respect rather than disrespect. In this study, it appears that the formation of a taboo word that is linked to an animal such as a ‘dog’ is due to some religious beliefs in Iranian society (see Section 4.2)

In the Islamic faith, the dominant religion of Iranian society, some animals are considered to be ‘dirty’ and so the Islamic faith forbids its believers to keep these animals as pets, for instance dogs (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Based on these prohibitions laid down by the Islamic faith, it can be said that taboo expressions which are related to certain animals like ‘dog’ arose because of religion.

Further, since the majority of Iranians are Muslims, it is also considered taboo to call someone an atheist (az khoda bi khabar) and doing so would mean saying that the individual has no religion and does not believe in God. To Iranians, this is a big taboo.

Dirt/filth

The formation of the taboo word ‘kesaafat’ (dirt/ filthy) is also related to the religious belief in Islam which forbids a Muslim from contacting or eating anything unclean. However, it was noticed that a taboo word like ‘kesaafat’ was probably formed because it represented the unclean nature of the person and his/her filthy inner intention and

behavior. Anything filthy raises people's hatred and disgust so labeling someone filthy or dirty expresses the same feeling towards the addressee. This taboo word is rooted in the religious beliefs of Iranians.

Formation of taboo words due to 'value assumptions'

As seen in the movie, "Qeisar", many taboo words used by the characters were related to moral issues. It appears that prior to the revolution, values such as morality, generosity, forgiveness and kindness were considered strong social and personal values that Iranians had to have and so anyone who did not have these values would be considered as an outcast (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). Using such words on a person makes it taboo. Hence to call another person 'bi marefat' (unscrupulous), 'naa kes' (ignoble) and 'bi qeirat' (spiritless) was considered taboo because such labels showed that the addressee did not care about the welfare and rights of the other people.

Formation of taboo words due to 'behavioral rules'

In Iran, like any other country, there is a set of rules which everybody must obey. Breaking these rules is considered as committing a taboo regardless of whether it is in behavior or in language. For instance, any form of insulting, swearing or cursing a person for the purpose of expressing one's anger, frustration and dissatisfaction is considered inappropriate and rude behavior (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4) in all societies. This too applies to Iranian society and consequently, expressions such as 'ajab adame khengi hasti' (what a stupid person you are) and 'charto part mige' (he talks nonsense) were considered as taboo expressions. Thus taboo words were formed as a way of deterring such behavior in the society.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘political Institutions’

In Pahlavi regime, Iran was ruled by monarchy which can be quite suppressive, however, people had many other human rights. The only problem was that Iranian people prior to the revolution were not allowed to express their ideas on political issues. Should they attempt to do this, the regime would take immediate action against the protesters (Nayeri, 1993). Therefore, the cinema, as a public media was very much controlled and strictly censored by the government (see Chapter 2, Section 1.4). However, it will be discussed later in this chapter that after the revolution, Iranians not only failed to attain the political freedom they sought, but they also lost their freedom in other fields (Sadjadpour, 2012).

The following section shows the formation of taboo words in “Qeisar” due to microcontextual factors.

Taboo words classification in “Qeisar” based on microcontextual (situational) factors

Data analyzed under the microcontextual factors are classified and presented in Table 4.10. (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4)

Table 4.10: Taboo Words Classification in “Qeisar” Based on Microcontextual (Situational) Factors

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	Translation
Participants	None	None
Purpose of conversation & attitudes of participants	Tike tikashun mikonam. Mifrestaeshun oon donya. Khooneshuno mirizam. Benal.	I will slaughter/ murder them. I will kill them. I will kill them. Say what you want.
Content or Subject Matter	Mifrestameshun zire khaak. Ferestaadameshun zire khaak.	I will murder them. I murdered them.
Setting	None	None
Medium	None	None

It can be seen that out of the five (5) categories listed by Hongxu and Guisen (1990) in their microcontextual factors, this study was only able to find two (2) categories in the movie “Qeisar”. These two categories encompass a) the purpose of the conversation and attitudes of the participants and b) the content or subject matter.

Taboo formation due to ‘participants’

It seems clear that the participants, their age, gender and social status did not impact the formation of any taboo words in the movie. According to Hongxu and Guisen (1990), a speaker has to pay attention to a listener’s age, sex, occupation and social status so as to avoid causing offense or irritation. Hongxu and Guisen (ibid) mention that a speaker should know whether the listener is sensitive to any words or expressions or whether use of any words might cause disgust or embarrassment to the listener. For instance, most people apply the expression ‘see you again’ in their daily conversation (which is not a taboo) when they take leave of each other whereas prisoners consider it taboo to use ‘see you again’ to an inmate who has been released as it means the released person will be imprisoned again (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). There were no taboo words formed by this particular factor in the movie “Qeisar”. However, this situation occurs also in the movie “Separation”.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘purpose of the conversation and attitudes of the participants’

The movie characters in “Qeisar” represented the lower class and middle-class families of Iran prior to the revolution. The lower class family, as has been depicted in the movie, was consistently struggling with their family problems such as poverty, crime and oppression (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). This is probably the main reason why most of the taboo words identified were associated with ‘the need to take revenge’ and

‘murder’. Taboo words when used by the respective speakers may carry different purposes; the participants/speakers may have different reasons for using those taboo words in their speech and in this case, taboo words were used by the respective characters to voice their resentment, anger and frustration (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). According to Hongxu and Guisen (1990), in some cases the participants employ taboo words deliberately to show their attitude such as dislike of a misdeed or inappropriate behavior.

If we consider the theory proposed by Hymes (1972) and Liedlich (1973), then it is probable that the movie characters in “Qeisar” used the taboo expression of ‘mifrestameshun oon donya’ (I will kill them) or ‘tike tikashun mikonam’ (I will slaughter them) and ‘khooneshuno mirizam’ (I will kill them) to provoke a violent confrontation that involves Mansour and his brothers. It is also possible that the taboo expression was used by Qeisar as a way of showing his strength, his attitude, as well as to enable him (Qeisar) to release his intense anger towards Mansour, the rapist who had caused misery in his family (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

The word ‘benaal’, for example, which means to mourn and groan, is not taboo in Farsi language if it is used in a related situation (see Section 4.2.1). However, when the addresser applies the word ‘benaal’ (mourn) to an addressee in his/her speech, it shows the unwillingness of the speaker to listen to the addressee’s speech. Use in such a context indicates the word is taboo because it is an impolite way to permit someone to talk about his/her complaints, worries or opinions. In the movie, in a scene where Qeisar was talking to Soheila, the singer at the club, Soheila asked Qeisar to say what he needed via the word ‘benal’ (mourn). In this conversation, the purpose and the participant’s attitude influenced the use of this taboo word as the context had converted a non-taboo word to a taboo-word (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

Formation of taboo words due to ‘content or subject matter’

As Table 4.5 depicts, there were two taboo expressions due to the topic in “Qeisar”. The expression ‘mifrestameshun zire khaak’ (I will send them under the ground) and ‘ferestadameshun zire khaak’ (I sent them under the ground) which means ‘I will kill/killed them’ are affected by the content of the speech. Putting something ‘zire khaad’ (under the ground) is not taboo in Farsi language. One can put a plant’s root, garbage or any other thing under the ground and he/she can apply this expression to refer to the action he/she does. Nevertheless, this expression can be converted to a harsh taboo when referring to a person, in a fight or in an argument. Qeisar used these taboo expressions when he wanted to show his vengeful intention towards Mansour (the rapist) and his brothers. It therefore could be deducted that the subject of the conversation had an impact on the formation of these taboo expressions; otherwise, in other contexts these expressions are not considered taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4).

Formation of taboo words due to ‘setting’

Setting, another important factor in the formation of taboo words was not seen in “Qeisar” and “Separation”. According to Hongxu and Guisen’s (1990) definition, setting refers to the formal and informal situations in which language is applied. For instance, people avoid expressing their disagreements directly in diplomatic negotiations and try to use less direct and harsh language (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). In the present study the researcher could not find any taboo words formed by the factor ‘setting’ As for instance in the movie “Separation” being in a formal location like the Supreme Court resulted in the characters not use any taboo words.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘medium’

Another factor that was not found in the formation of the taboo words in “Qeisar” was medium. Any words, both taboo and non-taboo can be conveyed through two media: the spoken and the written medium, however, the spoken medium is stronger and has a wider impact as most taboo words are confined within speech (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). Any particular medium used can affect the speaker or the writer to decide whether a word will be taboo or not. For instance, in Chinese language, many names are considered taboo as they are homonyms to some taboo words (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990). In this regard, the researcher could not find any taboo words formed by this medium in the movie “Qeisar” and “Separation”.

4.4.2 Macrocontextual and Microcontextual Factors in the Movie “Separation”

In this section, the taboo words in “Separation” were similarly categorized based on the factors which led to the formation of the taboo words according to macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) factors (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

The result of this classification is shown in the following sections.

Taboo words classification in “Separation” based on macrocontextual (societal) factors

The taboo words retrieved from the movie “Separation” were classified into six (6) macrocontextual factors (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). This is shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Taboo Words Classification in “Separation” Based on Macrocontextual (Societal) Factors

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	English
Social Structure	Shaashide too khodesh.	He has pissed in his pants.
Cultural Heritage	Goore babaye talaagh. Goore pedare kharej! Goore pedare man. Kodoom goori? Kodoom goori boodi?	Hell with the divorce. Hell with the abroad! Hell with my father. Where the hell? Where the hell have you been?
Religious Beliefs	Toole sag! Mesle sag endakhtanam biroon. Bar pedaret! Kesaafat!	Dog’s offspring! They fired me. God damn your father. Dirt/ Filthy!
Value Assumptions	Bi sharaf! To mardi? Bi sharafam?	Knavish/ Roguish! Are you a man? Don’t I have any honor/dignity?
Behavioral Rules	Gom sho. Mozakhraf mige.	Get lost. He talks nonsense.
Political Institutions	None	None

As the data in the table above shows, only five (5) of the six categories were seen in, “Separation”, the movie made after the revolution. There was no taboo words associated with political subjects. It appears that the political issues of Iran are still controlled tightly and Iranians are probably restricted from talking about this theme even after the revolution, just as it had been before the revolution (see Section 4.4.1).

Formation of taboo word due to ‘social structure’

Data was able to show that the expression related to the social structure factors such as ‘shaashide too khodesh’ (he has pissed in his pants) was found in the analysis. As has been explained earlier in this chapter in section 4.4, some words were mostly used by a particular sector of a society. This means that some words used by a particular group of people may not seem taboo but it becomes taboo when used by another group of people. This is the case in a society which has layers of classes. For instance, a word that is used

by the middle class may not seem taboo but when the same word is used by the lower class, it becomes taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). The word ‘shaashidan’ (piss) may not convey or bear any taboo when it is used by the lower class families among the lower class families in Iran. However, it becomes taboo and inappropriate when it is used by middle class families as middle class families who are usually educated tend to use more refined language as compared to the lower class families (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). The same has been explained (see Section 4.2.1) about the use of the word ‘toilet’ or ‘dastshooie’. It can be said that the word ‘shaashidan’ (piss) was formed as a taboo word as a result of the social structure in Iranian society.

Formation of taboo word due to ‘cultural heritage’

Norms of culture can shift as people make changes to the traditions and practices they had inherited from their forefathers. It appears that the taboo words used by the characters in “Separation” were also affected by cultural factors. Death and any subjects related to death is often considered taboo (see Section 4.4.1). In this regard, the taboo expressions such as ‘goore pedare man’ (hell with my father), ‘kodoom goori?’ (where the hell?) used by characters were formed due to cultural factors.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘religious beliefs’

According to Teymori (2012), taboo words in Iranian society are rooted in two major factors, 1) religious law and 2) customs. As the movie, “Separation” depicted, there were several taboo words formed by religious beliefs. One example of such taboo words was the word ‘toole sag’ (dog’s offspring) used in the movie “Separation” (see Section 4.4.1) The character used this taboo word to refer to children born to lower class families and was used to compare middle class and lower class children.

The other expression that Hojat used was ‘mesle sag endakhtanam biroon’ (they threw me away like a dog) which also indicated the lower class status in the society. Hojat felt that he was oppressed by his employer who belonged to the middle class of the society. It could be reasoned that the taboo word ‘dog’ was applied to show the miserable and unpleasant treatment the lower class received at the hands of other members of the society.

Another word, ‘bar pedaret’ (God damn your father) was also considered a taboo word and it was formed as a result of the religious beliefs of the Iranians (see Section 4.2).

The taboo word ‘kesaafat’ (dirt or filthy) as it was used in the movie “Qeisar” (see Section 4.4.1) indicates that the religious beliefs in Iranian society had already existed. Interestingly, this taboo word was also used by Razieh’s husband who represented the lower class sector of the society of Iran in the movie “Separation”. From this evidence it is deduced that the word ‘kesaafat’ was deliberately used as a swearword by the speaker in order to insult the addressee’ (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). It was also used as a means of showing the addressee how mean and unclean his/her inner intentions were. As evidence illustrates, this taboo word was used by the lower class members of Iranian society before and after the revolution to insult a middle class member of the community. Thus, it can be seen that Iranian religious beliefs can make a word taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2).

Formation of taboo words due to ‘value assumptions’

The number of taboo words that was formed as a result of the influence of social values in the movie “Separation” made after the revolution was far less than in the movie “Qeisar” (see Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). Two taboo words were uttered by the movie

character (Hojat) who represented the lower class and these were the words ‘bi sharaf’/ ‘bi sharafam? (knavish or roguish). In fact, ‘sharaf’ (dignity and honor) is so much that strong and acceptable social value among Iranians (see Section 4.4.1) that without it, a person’s integrity becomes questioned. Value assumptions can therefore make a word taboo.

Another taboo expression that was also used by Hojat, the lower class family member presented in the movie was ‘To mardi?’ (Are you a man?) (see Section 4.2.2) Hojat, who belonged to the lower wondered why Nader who was born a man lacked manliness and generosity and attacked a woman (Razieh, Hojat’s wife) who was considered weak and caused her to lose her child.

Formation of taboo words due to ‘behavioral rules’

Words like ‘gom sho’ (get lost) and ‘mozakhraf mige (He talks nonsense/rubbish) were also identified as taboo and they were most likely to have formed because of the behavioral rules expected by Iranian society during interactions. In this regard, when literally getting lost, one can use the expression 'gom shodan' and it is not considered taboo (see Section 4.2.2). However, employing this word in a quarrel is considered taboo.

The expression ‘mozakhraf mige’ (he talks nonsense/rubbish) was also applied in the movie “Qeisar” by the middle class member portrayed in the movie (see Section 4.4.1). Interestingly, the same taboo words were articulated by Nader and Simin, the couple from the middle class family shown in “Separation” for the same purpose (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

If these words were used by a speaker upon any addressee, the speaker would be breaking a norm or behavioral rule of Iranians. The reason is because such rules even

though unspecified or unwritten, are laid down by Iranian society. Thus, anyone who breaks this rule commits a taboo (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1).

Formation of taboo words due to ‘political institutions’

As it was discussed earlier in this chapter, political restriction has always dominated Iran’s society and people are not allowed to freely express their opinions on political issues. This could be considered as the main reason for not using any taboo words associated to politics in the media such as cinema.

The next section will explain the microcontextual or situational factors which affected the use of some of the taboo words in the movie “Separation”.

Taboo words classification in “Separation” based on microcontextual (situational) factors

This section will present the findings according to the microcontextual factors (see Section 4.4).

Table 4.12 is presented to illustrate the categories and the examples.

Table 4.12: The Classification of Taboo Words in “Separation” Based on Microcontextual (situational) Factors

TABOO WORDS		
FACTORS	Farsi	English
Participants	None	None
Purpose of conversation & the attitudes of participants	Maraz dashtin? Mesle adam harf bezan. Qalat kardam. Qalat kardi. Qalat mikone. Bi khod kardi.	Why on earth did you do it? Say clearly what you want. I made a mistake. You dare to do it. He should repent. You should repent for your silly act.
Content or Subject Matter	Goh mikhori.	You dare to do it.
Setting	None	None
Medium	None	None

As the data presented in the table shows, the analysis of the movie “Separation” had a similar result to the movie “Qeisar” regarding microcontextual factors’ effect on taboo words (see Section 4.4.1). The two factors that impact the formation of the taboo words were a) purpose of conversation and the attitudes of participants and b) content or subject matter. As discussed in the movie “Qeisar”, there were no taboo words formed due to the participants, setting or medium (see Section 4.4.1)

Taboo formation due to ‘purpose of conversation and the attitude of participants’

The words which were categorized under this category could be seen in two ways. Firstly, they were not normally considered as taboo words in Farsi language. However, if these words were used as a word to curse or swear at the addressee, then it becomes a taboo word (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). For instance, sickness/disease (maraz) is not taboo in Farsi. Nevertheless, when this word was applied to address someone (Azam to Nader and Simin) in a violent manner, it became taboo as it was used to express Azam’s anger towards Nader and Simin’s behavior. It can be concluded that a non-taboo word can become a taboo word due to the purpose of the conversation (see Section 4.4).

Another example of non-taboo words that were converted to taboo was the expression ‘qalat kardan’ (make a mistake). It is obvious that using the word ‘mistake’ (qalat) is not considered taboo in Farsi language. However, once this word was used to pinpoint one’s misdeed and inappropriate behavior in conversation, it was considered taboo because it was used as a swearword to insult and disrespect the addressees. It is clear that participants’ purpose of conversation and attitudes were the important key factors to convert a non-taboo word to taboo (see Section 4.4).

The other taboo expression used in the movie was ‘mesle aadam harf bezan’ (talk like a human). Likewise, this expression is not considered taboo in normal conversation in

Farsi language. Nevertheless, when it was applied by Simin to address Nader, her husband, it is considered taboo as Simin expressed her anger and frustration at the nonsense verbalized by Nader. The purpose of the conversation and the attitude of the speaker contributed to the formation of such taboo words (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Taboo formation due to ‘content or subject matter’

The subject matter can be an important indicator of words becoming taboo. For instance, the word ‘goh’ (shit) is already an unpleasant and rude word in Iranian society. It therefore becomes even more taboo when the word ‘goh mikori’ is used by a speaker as the expression literally means ‘eat shit’ and no one likes to be told to ‘eat shit’. This example suggests that a taboo word can be formed based on the content or subject matter (see Section 4.4).

As discussed in section 4.4.1 and based on Table 4.12, it is clear setting, participants and medium did not influence the creation of any taboo words in the movies “Separation” and “Qeisar” (see Section 4.4.1). Although in Hongxu and Guisen's (1990) study in Chinese language, participants (age, sex, social status), setting (formal and informal situation) and medium (spoken and written media) influenced the use of taboo words, this study shows that taboo words were not influenced by these factors (see Sections 4.4 and 4.4.1).

4.5 A Comparison of the Formation of Taboo Words in the Two Movies

As a result of the analysis shown which demonstrates the number of taboo words formed due to their link to societal factors including a) cultural heritage, b) religious beliefs, c) value assumptions, and d) behavioral rules, it was found that there were more taboo words related to the macrocontextual (societal factors), about 34 words as compared to the ones related to microcontextual (situational) factors which were about

13 words which includes the category of a) purpose of conversation and attitudes of participants and b) content or subject matter.

Societal factors such as religious beliefs, value assumptions, cultural heritage and behavioral rules appear to have a stronger impact when it comes to the formation of taboo words which are used by the lower class and middle class families in Iranian society. This is the case pre and post revolution. Many of the words are aligned to Islamic ideology rather than political ideology. This could be due to the political landscape of Iran both before and after the revolution which strongly prohibits its citizens from talking about the government (see Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3).

In looking at the formation of taboo words from the microcontextual factor, it was found that in both movies, two categories existed: a) the purpose of the conversation and attitudes of the participants and b) the content or subject matter of the conversation which were the most effective factors to have contributed to the formation of the taboo words in the movies. Regardless of the social classes that had been depicted in the two movies, it appears that ‘the purpose of the conversation’ had caused some Farsi non-taboo words to become taboo (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). Further, the subject matter which the participants were talking about could also lead to the formation of taboo words. The formality of the situation, medium and the participants’ age, gender and education did not contribute to the formation of any taboo words either before or after the revolution (see Section 4.4.1). In addition, the influence of situational or contextual factors (microcontextual) on the formation of taboo words remained unchanged over the time span depicted in the two movies.

4.6 Discussion

Holmes (1992) has mentioned that the way people speak during interactions display where they come from in the social hierarchy of a society. She claims, for example, that educated people use less taboo language as compared to uneducated people within a society (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1) as is shown in the movie “Qeisar” produced before the revolution in Iran whereas this is not reflected in the movie “Separation” as the lower class and middle class employed almost the same number of taboo words in their utterances.

Holmes provides evidence of the conversation of men along dockyards as well as men and women in professional settings. In looking at politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) also mention that the more intimate the relationship between two people is, the more ‘crude’ their language may be. In other words, the closer the relationship, the less polite the two people are likely to behave. If we translate the notion of politeness as ‘being refined’ and ‘polished’, then it can be construed that the closer the relationship, the more likely the two people are going to be using taboo language forms or features. For example, Fernandez (2008) who focused on the language of male Indian undergraduates who were from the lower social economic families talking among themselves during casual interactions found that the male Indian undergraduates used a lot of taboo words which were related to their anatomy and sex. In this regard, it was concluded that people from the lower class families, before the revolution in Iran, would also be using more taboo words. This is because they were perceived to be from a lowly class, with majority of them being uneducated and had weak economic statuses. Due to their constant need to struggle and make a living as well as due to their consistent tug of war with social and family issues, they were more likely to use taboo words (Lehsaeizadeh, 2004). It could also be deducted that using taboo words allows the

speakers to unload their frustrations and anger as observations of our own daily lives reveal (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

It cannot be either denied that Iranian society and culture is governed by a strong Islamic faith (Vahdat, 2003). In Iranian society and culture, taboo words are discouraged as they are considered a mark of disrespect for their listeners. Nonetheless, like any society in this world, the use of taboo words cannot be stopped from being used. Most people use taboo words as swear words (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). Others use taboo words as profanities or even for humor (see the western comedies or sitcoms). Whether it is acceptable or not, people use such language (taboo) as a way of venting their anger, frustration or dissatisfaction or even for humor (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Using the personal experiences of the researcher who has lived in Iran before and after the revolution, it was concluded that there could have been a possibility that after the revolution, the gap between the lower class and the middle class had decreased since the government was changed and people expected more fairness. In Iran, like many other countries, changing one's social class is difficult and once one is born into, it is the social class they stay in for their lifetime (Satrapi, 2003). In this regard, this expectation can be attributed to the fact that after revolution, there are more people from the lower class (this occurs in most countries) who would now have access to education, employment and other privileges they had been deprived of previously and move to the other social class of society. This is particularly in Iran where the lower class was the backbone of the revolutionary movements as Saber (1990) mentions. It has been also perceived by most societies (see Confucius, Western Propaganda) that education enables a community to progress hence, access to education in Iran may enable the members of the lower class to achieve similar dreams as their middle class counterparts. Eventually,

this access, if achieved, could also narrow the economic gap. Thus, the status of the middle class families was no longer as compatible or as privileged as before the revolution, if the government had created any change for the lower class people. It appears that as the lower class families caught up with the middle class families after the revolution, which was guarded by an 8-year war between Iran and Iraq from 1980-1988 followed by the strict social, political and economic sanctions from Western and European countries as after the revolution, almost all the social classes in Iran were struggling with the same issues of unemployment, financial problems, housing and education and the gap between the social classes narrowed (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3).

The new government, the Islamic republic, was raised from the lower class sector of Iranian society. With their rise, many of the social rules, customs, beliefs and policies also changed according to the supreme leader's ideology and command. It cannot be denied that then the political leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, 1979-1989, was a very religious and traditional person (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). It is possible that these values of the new leadership could have created a direct impact on the lower class families' beliefs, culture and attitudes after the revolution. Moreover, social media including television, newspapers and radio had also been helping the government, after the revolution. They consistently projected news about Islamic values, behavior, norms and beliefs of the lower class members of the Iranian social structure which were then shared via the social media. In that regard, it is possible that the influence of the lower class sector of Iranian society on the Iranian government might have made an impact on the way the Iranian language is used, particularly taboo words, among the middle class sector of Iranian community.

Regarding the gender discrimination in Iran, it should be noted here that within Iranian culture, men are seen as leaders of the family and women tend to abide by the rules passed down by the men such as their fathers or husbands. Men work and through work they show the reputation of the family while women dedicate themselves to their home and family (Azqandi, 2000). In this regard, Iranian women are thus more likely to refrain from breaking societal expectations. They thus refrain from using these ‘men-specific’ taboo words. It also seems that should Iranian women be found to be using masculine taboos, the public reaction to the women who use taboo in Iranian society would be more unpleasant than what is imposed on men as Zarin Panah (2004) has found. For instance, men can talk freely about a tabooed subject like sex or sexual relationships even in public places while if a woman talks about such tabooed subjects, they would be frowned and scolded by others (Teymori, 2012). The idea of masculine and feminine in Iranian society is also rooted in Iranian religion, culture, politics and social norms (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1).

The next chapter will provide the summary of the study, the answers to the research questions, and recommendation for further studies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The present study was conducted to investigate the taboo words used by the characters in two Iranian movies made in two different eras: “Qeisar” made before the revolution (1969) and “Separation” made after the revolution (2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate how two of the social classes in Iran: lower class families and middle class families use taboo words. To do this, the researcher had to select two specific movies based on two criteria: the year (pre and post revolution) they were made and the popularity they created (award winning). The basic aim of this study was to investigate whether or not taboo words were used by the movie characters and if so, what category would these taboo words fall under and what possible factors had affected the formation of the taboo words. To define whether the words used were taboo or not, the researcher consulted three dictionaries a) Dehkhoda b) Haim and c) Arianpour (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1). The researcher also relied on her own ethnic background as an Iranian who had lived in the pre and post-revolution period as a guide to extract the taboo words. Further, all the taboo words identified from the two movies were then listed and shown to ten (10) Iranians (see Appendix B) in order to confirm if they were considered as taboo. The taboo words extracted from the movies were then categorized according to the classification of tabooed subjects proposed by Hongxu and Guisen (1990). It should be noted here that the framework presented by Hongxu and Guisen (1990) covered only four categories of tabooed subjects including 1) sex, 2) bodily functions, 3) sanctity and 4) unpleasant matters. Hence, the data required the researcher to add three (3) more categories so as to classify all the taboo words used in the movies. The other three categories were: 5) death, 6) animals and 7) morality (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5). These taboo words were also counted based on tabooed subjects manually in order to

determine their frequency of use. Tables were also made to provide a clearer discussion of the data and analysis. Finally, the same data were also classified under what Hongxu and Guisen (1990) defined as macrocontextual (societal) and micrcontextual (situational) factors.

This chapter will begin by providing a summary of all the findings and answering the research questions. The limitations of this study are further explained and the implications of this study are again reiterated before recommendations for further research are provided.

5.1.1 Research Question 1:

What are considered as taboo words in the two movies made in different time frames?

The result of this study showed that taboo words were used in both movies, “Qeisar” in 1969 and “Separation” after the revolution in 2011. Based on the data extracted and analyzed, it was found that the number of taboo words uttered by the movie characters in “Qeisar”, a movie which was made before the revolution, was far more than those used by the characters in “Separation”, a movie that was made after the revolution.

In looking at these two social classes in Iran, lower class and middle class, as portrayed in the two movies which incidentally illustrated two different eras of time, it was found that the characters who belonged to the lower-class families tended to use more taboo words as compared to those in the middle-class families. It can be concluded that lower class families who are normally less educated or illiterate and do not have a stable social and financial status and are struggling with many social and personal issues tend to apply more taboo words and expressions compared to middle class sector of the society (see Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3). As Azzaro (2005) suggests applying vulgar

language is a matter of social class as can be seen in the two movies. For this sector of the society, applying taboo words is a way to express their frustration, hatred, anger, dissatisfaction and disappointment towards the conditions they are living in or at other members of the society (Liedlich, 1973).

In chapter 4, section 4.1.1 it has been explained that such a phenomenon was due to the nature or plot of the movie or storyline. “Qeisar” was made for the lower class people hence the movie characters were invariably more of the lower class people.

According to Holmes’ (1992) theory of communication, participants’ social and financial status, along with their level of education will determine their tendency to use taboo words. As has been explained earlier (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1) the characters, who were presenting the lower class people, were also those who belonged to the poorest group of the society. Regardless of whether they wanted to or not, they were also more likely to be facing issues of suppression and oppression by the richer group. They had more issues such as illness, financial inadequacy, unemployment, oppression and suppression by richer people and they were despised by society. They also lacked social support. They were more likely to want to vent their frustrations and anger (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1) and what better way to do this than use swearwords or taboo words?

The male characters in the two movies used more taboo words as compared to the female characters. As it has been mentioned (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3), gender has a key role in the use of taboo words. Women tend to apply more refined and polite language than men do as society expects women to act femininely and avoid any rough, crude and impolite language. According to Coates (1986), the restriction imposed on

women has been connected with religious and cultural rules and therefore women are more polite than men either in their act or speech.

The words and expressions which were considered taboo in both movies were basically words that tended to insult, disrespect, despise and curse the addressees in both time eras, before and after the revolution (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2). There were also some taboo words used to address themselves in the conversation rather than the addressees. The intention of using those taboo words, either as swearword to others or as a self-condemnation was an indicator of the addresser's anger, violent confrontation, and frustration (see Liedlich, 1973).

5.1.2 Research Question 2:

What tabooed subjects are these words and expressions associated with?

Based on the framework used in categorizing taboo words in terms of tabooed subjects (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4), seven (7) major categories were defined. It appears that taboo words which were formed according to death, morality and unpleasant concepts comprised the largest categories of tabooed subjects in the movie "Qeisar" as compared to the other categories including animals and sanctity. The researcher then deducted morality that includes a wide range of connotation such as humanity, generosity, forgivingness and loyalty was an important social value for Iranians who lived in that era, particularly among the lower class families. In this regards, it is important to note that all the taboo words applied in the movie "Qeisar" were uttered by the lower class members of the society portrayed in the movie. Except two taboo words that were uttered by the middle class members. The researcher, however, could not find any taboo words associated with sex and bodily functions in the movie made before the revolution. Perhaps the restrictions imposed on Iranians due to their cultural values and religious laws, were the cause of this (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1).

In terms of tabooed subject in the movie “Separation” made after the revolution, ‘unpleasant concepts’ and ‘death’ made up the first two largest categories respectively as compared to the other categories. Unlike “Qeisar”, morality issues did not have an important place in conversations of the characters. Interestingly the only three taboo words connected to morality was uttered by Hojat, the lower class family member. This could be an indicator that after the revolution, the lower class families still give importance to values such as manliness, generosity and loyalty (see Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3). They still felt oppressed and ignored by the middle class sector of the society and they believed that the middle class lacked those values. There were a few taboo words used that were associated with sanctity and animals. However, unlike the movie “Qeisar”, there were two taboo expressions applied in the category of ‘bodily functions’. The ‘sex’ category did not contain any taboo words as in the movie “Qeisar” probably for the same reason that Iranian society is a closed and restricted one (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Taboo words used in the movie “Separation”, made after the revolution was not limited to the lower class members of the society. In “Separation” members of both the lower and the middle class applied taboo words in their conversation for different purposes. This finding, however, contradicts Holmes’ (1992) theory of communication that the more educated people are, the less their tendency to use taboo words (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1). As it is depicted in the movie, the middle class members portrayed applied taboo words as much as the lower class did. It is clear that tabooed subjects, as depicted in the two movies pre and post the revolution in Iran has changed as the lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs and social norms and values and political system of Iranians has also changed over time. What was considered taboo to Iranians 42 years ago is now seen as common words used in daily conversations (see Humphries, 1999).

5.1.3 Research Question 3:

What is the frequency count of the taboo words used by the movie characters based on tabooed subjects?

The data showed that the majority (14) of the taboo words used by the movie characters in “Qeisar” was linked to morality followed by death (9). There was only one taboo word associated with sanctity and 2 in the animal category. There were no taboo words related to sex and bodily functions in “Qeisar”.

The second movie “Separation” had the largest number of taboo words (12) which belonged to unpleasant matters. It was followed by taboo words related to death and morality which stood at five (5) taboo words each. Bodily functions and animals comprised the same number of taboo words (2). In contrast, sanctity made up the smallest number of taboo words used in the movie (1). Like the movie “Qeisar” no taboo words belonged to the sex category in “Separation”. Sex-related subjects appear to be still taboo after the revolution.

5.1.4 Research Question 4:

What macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) factors could have influenced the formation of certain taboo words over this time frame?

The researcher compared the macrocontextual (societal) and microcontextual (situational) factors proposed by Hongxu and Guisen’s (1990) framework which influenced the formation of taboo words used in both movies. In general, in terms of macrocontextual (societal) factors, social structure, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, value assumptions and behavioral rules were the six (6) effective factors out of the seven (7) factors suggested (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4) to form the taboo words used in

the movie “Qeisar”. Political institutions did not influence the formation of any taboo words uttered by the movie characters probably due to the lack of political freedom in that era (Sadjadpour, 2012). Amongst these six categories, value assumption comprised the most effective factors on taboo formation. Moral values and social virtues were highly respected by lower class families as tradition, culture and religion were inseparable parts from their life (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2) followed by cultural heritage and religious beliefs as the important values among the lower class families. Social structure had the least important role in the formation of the taboo words in that era. Behavioral rules also affected the formation of several taboo words in the movie “Qeisar” made before the revolution (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4).

As for microcontextual (situational) factors, there were only two factors a) purpose of conversation and attitude of participants and b) content or subject matter determined as effective factors which contributed to the use of taboo words. Purpose of conversation and attitude of participants was a more effective factor to form the taboo words as compared to the content or subject matter in the movie “Qeisar” (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4).

The macrocontextual (societal) factors which affected the formation of taboo words in “Separation” were similar to the factors which contributed to the formation of taboo words in “Qeisar”. The only difference is that religious beliefs and cultural heritage were determined to be the most effective factors in the taboo formation. Social structure comprised the least effective factor followed by behavioral rules and value assumptions (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4). There was no taboo word that was formed by the political institutions as was also the case in the movie “Qeisar” (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5).

According to microcontextual (situational) factors, purpose of conversation and attitudes of participants contributed most to form the taboo words in “Separation” while content or subject matter had far less impact on the formation of the taboo words (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4).

According to Hongxu and Guisen’s (1990) definitions of setting (formal and informal situation), participants (their age, sex, education and social status) and medium (spoken and written media), the researcher could not find any taboo words formed by any of the three mentioned factors in either of the two movies (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4).

5.2 Limitations

The first limitation of the study is the corpus of data as there were a limited number of taboo words uttered by the movie characters (see Chapter 1, Section 1.8). Another limitation was that the taboo words in the Iranian movies were restricted to Iranian language, Farsi, and Iranian culture. As a result, referring to the Standard English translation, in some cases, does not bear any tabooess in the viewpoint of non-Iranian readers. (see Chapter 1, Section 1.8).

This study could only focus on a particular genre- tragic-action and findings might be different if other genres were studied. In addition, the study was restricted to only two (2) social classes of Iranian society, the lower, uneducated and poor class with unstable social status and educated middle class with a stable social and financial status.

Moreover, Iranian society as a closed society could in turn affect the taboo words application in the movies, in particular the movie “Separation” that was made after the revolution in Iran as the media censorship like cinema industry is strictly practiced in post revolutionary Iran (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4).

It should be noted here that the limitations mentioned above would definitely impact the findings of the current study.

5.3 Implications

This study provides a comparison of taboo words used by movie characters in two movies made in two different eras. Specifically, this study focused on two social structures of the Iranian society: the lower-class and the middle-class families. The findings indicate that different social levels in a society use different taboo words in their daily interactions and communication with others (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). The tabooed subjects analyzed may differ from one social class to another and from one period of time to the other. The analysis further showed that there were no taboo words linked to political institution which can be evidence of political restrictions before and after the revolution in Iran.

The study also indicates that education, social status and economy can affect the language a community applies (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). The middle class families in Iran who were mostly educated, with a relatively stable welfare and financial status tended to use less taboo words as compared to the lower class section of the society who were less educated and who had a lower quality of life in the era before the revolution. This made the lower class members more dissatisfied and unhappy (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2) and as a result they had to find a way to vent their frustration. One way to do this, as has been explained in chapter 4 was by using words. Unlike the movie “Qeisar” in which the lower class articulated the more taboo words as compared to the middle class, the characters in the movie “Separation”, both from lower class and middle class applied almost the same number of taboo words in their conversation. This could be an indicator that the middle class families after the revolution, regardless they

want to or not, apply taboo words in their conversation. The social gap between the lower class and middle class narrowed after the revolution and hence many attitudes and social norms and values changed (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6).

5.4 Recommendation for Further Research

This study focused on the use of taboo words by Iranian society. Specifically it focuses on two eras (pre and post revolution) and two different social classes (lower and middle class). As this study was not looking at real-life situations where conversations were those that had developed because of real-life contexts and by real-people, there could be limitations in the sense that the dialogues of the movie characters were composed and scripted. Thus, these conversations may not be considered as authentic. However, there is also the possibility that all movie characters performed their roles based on what they see in real-life and their conversations as were developed in the movie script by the writer who would have tried to make these conversations or dialogues as close as possible to real-life events.

Recommendations for further research on the use taboo words focus on real contexts. Other recommendations are now provided. First, further research should make attempts to obtain a more detailed description of situational or societal factors which could impact on taboo words formation. Secondly, it is recommended that further research investigate other factors such as the gender factor and how this could affect the use of taboo words, particularly among the lower-class families in Iran. In addition, it would also be a good idea to look at other genres.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter showed that Iranian society; in particular, the lower-class and middle-class families experienced changes in the use of taboo words in the Farsi language. According to the Hudson's (1980) theory, social factors including social structure and norms, cultural pattern, socio-economic, political and religious status, age and sex can affect the language a community uses. In the case of Iran, the revolution brought about such changes.

These changes are directly concerned with Iranian society's cultural values and social norms and beliefs (Saber, 1990). It appears that prior to the revolution, morality and humanity were the most valuable criteria and this is evidenced by how many of the taboo words were related to such topics (see Table 4.5) while nowadays, morality is not ranked as important and it appears that more taboo words used after the revolution are related to unpleasant concepts, ones which offend and insult addressees (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6).

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APPENDIX A

a) Sample of the Questionnaire, the Movie “Qeisar”

Name:

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Date of Birth:

Education:

Social Class (What social class do you consider yourself?):

☐ Lower Class

☐ Middle Class

☐ Upper Class

In your opinion, are these words and expressions taboo or not taboo in Farsi?

Taboo Words and Expressions in “Qeisar”	Taboo	Not Taboo
Che khaaki be saram shod.		
Che khaaki be saram konam?		
Khaak bar saram.		
Bi marefataa!		
Naa looti!		
Khooneshoono mirizam.		
Tike tikashun mikonam.		
Naa mard!		
Bi qeirat!		
Az ye sag kamtari.		
Eyne sag zad zireh.		
Naa kes!		
Bi hame chiz!		
Charto part mige.		
Az khoda bi khabar!		
Mifrestameshoon oon donya.		
Kesaafat!		
Bezan be chaak.		
Ferestaadam zire khaak.		
Mifrestameshun zire khaak.		
Ajab aadame khengi hasti.		
Saab Morde!		
Benal.		
Akele!		

b) Sample of Questionnaire, the Movie “Separation”

Name:

Sex: ☐ **Male** ☐ **Female**

Date of Birth:

Education:

Social Class (What social class do you consider yourself?):

☐ **Lower Class**

☐ **Middle Class**

☐ **Upper Class**

In your opinion, are these words and expressions taboo or not taboo in Farsi?

Taboo Words and Expressions in “Separation”	Taboo	Not Taboo
Bar pedaret!		
Bi sharaf!		
Bi khod kardi!		
Kodoom goori boodi?		
Qalat mikone.		
Kodoom Goori?		
Goore babaye talaagh!		
Chera mozakhraf migi?		
Goore pedare kharej!		
Mesle aadam harf bezan.		
Qalat kardi!		
Mozakhraf mige.		
Kesaafat!		
Shaashide too khodesh.		
Toule sag!		
Gom sho!		
Goh mikhori!		
Goore pedare man!		
Mesle sag endakhtanm biroon.		
To mardi?		
Maraz daashtin?		
Qalat kardam.		

APPENDIX B

Survey Results

a) Survey Result, the Movie “Qeisar”

Taboo Words and Expressions in “Qeisar”	Agree Taboo	Agree Not Taboo
Che khaaki be saram shod.	10	
Che khaaki be saram konam?	10	
Khaak bar saram.	10	
Bi marefataa!	8	2
Naa looti!	7	3
Khooneshoono mirizam.	10	
Tike tikashun mikonam.	10	
Naa mard!	7	3
Bi qeirat!	10	
Az ye sag kamtari.	10	
Eyne sag zad ziresh.	10	
Naa kes!	7	3
Bi hame chiz!	9	1
Charto part mige.	9	1
Az khoda bi khabar!	10	
Mifrestameshoon oon donya.	10	
Kesaafat!	10	
Bezan be chaak.	10	
Ferestaadam zire khaak.	10	
Mifrestameshun zire khaak.	10	
Ajab aadame khengi hasti.	10	
Saab Morde!	10	
Benal.	10	
Akele!	10	

b) Survey Result, the Movie “Separation”

Taboo Words and Expressions in “Separation”	Agree Taboo	Agree Not Taboo
Bar pedaret!	10	
Bi sharaf!	10	
Bi khod kardi!	10	
Kodoom goori boodi?	10	
Qalat mikone.	10	
Kodoom Goori?	10	
Goore babaye talaagh!	9	1
Chera mozakhraf migi?	10	
Goore pedare kharej!	9	1
Mesle aadam harf bezan.	10	
Qalat kardi!	10	
Mozakhraf mige.	10	
Kesaafat!	10	
Shaashide too khodesh.	9	1
Toule sag!	10	
Gom sho!	10	
Goh mikhori!	10	
Goore pedare man!	10	
Mesle sag endakhtanm biroon.	10	
To mardi?	10	
Maraz daashtin?	8	2
Qalat kardam.	10	